

FIRST GRADERS' SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED DEFINITIONS OF READING

By

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by

Elizabeth Bondy

To my family--

Bill, Mom, Dad, Cilla, and David

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By

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The purpose of this study was to investigate in detail the definitions of reading constructed by children in one first-grade classroom. The researcher assumed a social-interaction perspective by which definitions of reading were viewed as meanings individuals assigned to reading as a result of their interactions in social contexts. The study focused on two guiding questions:

1. What are the definitions of reading constructed by members of the low and high ability reading groups in one first-grade classroom?
2. Are there patterns in children's definitions within and across ability groups?

Qualitative research methods were used to collect and analyze data. Observations were conducted throughout the school day for 150 hours during the first four months of school. These observations focused on children's speech messages about reading, their reading-related behavior, and their use of reading materials. Formal and informal interviews were conducted with children in the low and high reading groups, their teacher, and the children's kindergarten teachers. In addition, children's cumulative school records were examined.



Data analysis was an ongoing process which proceeded through several phases. The analysis revealed six definitions of reading:

1. Reading is saying words correctly.
2. Reading is schoolwork.
3. Reading is a source of status.
4. Reading is a way to learn things.
5. Reading is a private pleasure.
6. Reading is a social activity.

Although definitions were not clearly differentiated by group, low group children tended to construct the first three definitions, and high group children tended to construct the second three definitions. No definitions were shared by all children, and most children used more than one definition to guide their reading-related behavior. Definition construction was found to be the result of an interactive process between the children and the teacher. Specifically, the variables which seemed to be related to children's definitions were cognitive developmental factors, children's entering views of reading, home experiences with written language, personality factors, and the context in which the defining process took place.

The study highlighted the complexity of teaching and learning processes. The results suggested that in order for teachers to provide effective reading instruction for all students, they must become sensitive to the students' ways of thinking about reading.

## CHAPTER I BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY

Recent observational studies indicate that prepackaged commercial programs seem to define the nature of reading instruction in many elementary classrooms (Duffy & McIntyre, 1980, 1982; Durkin, 1978-1979; Goodlad, 1983). Researchers have uncovered a pattern of instructional practice in which teachers move students through basal materials, assign workbook pages, listen to students recite from texts and workbooks, and respond to their answers. This input-output model of teaching in which teachers or materials deposit information and students are expected to display a particular response fails to account for what may be a critical factor in teaching and learning: the learners' perceptions of the object of instruction. That is, learners' perceptions of the skills, processes, or materials to be learned may influence the way they process instruction as well as their learning outcomes. In the area of reading, children's perceptions of the nature, purposes, and functions of reading may have great bearing on their progress as readers.<sup>1</sup>

### Statement of the Problem

If children came to classrooms as blank slates, teachers' jobs would be much easier. However, children enter school with well-formulated

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<sup>1</sup>In this study the notion of "perceptions" is interpreted differently from the traditional cognitive interpretation. See the discussion on pages 5-7 for clarification.

perceptions of the world in general and classroom life in particular. As they interact with objects and individuals in their environment, new perceptions develop and old ones are confirmed, modified, or rejected. Children use these perceptions in a continuous struggle to make sense of their world, and their perceptions influence their interpretation of and their response to classroom events. As long as children's perceptions and teachers' perceptions are synonymous, classroom life proceeds smoothly. However, a disparity in views may interfere with teaching and learning processes. If teachers are to provide effective instruction for all students, they must learn to recognize students' views of classroom phenomena. The purpose of this study was to identify the definitions of reading constructed by students in one first-grade classroom.

### Significance of the Study

Unlike much research and practice in reading instruction which focus on cognitive aspects of reading, the focus of this study is on the social milieu in which the learning process occurs. Why study children's perceptions of reading from this perspective? Researchers who have examined classrooms as social environments have uncovered multiple, differentiated forms of social organization within individual classrooms. The classroom has been shown to be an extremely complex, dynamic environment in which interacting students and teachers construct and abandon contexts from moment to moment. The social-interaction research perspective broadens the traditionally held notion of "perceptions" by viewing them as interactionally constructed products of

classroom contexts. An examination of social contexts, then, can reveal the perceptions children construct and utilize in the classroom.

McDermott (1977) has pointed out that educational researchers "have virtually ignored the social context of reading activities" (p. 154). By focusing on the many contexts in which classroom reading occurs, the present study attempts to investigate "the work that teachers and students do together to construct, maintain, and modify their definitions and conceptions about reading" (Anang, 1982, p. 1). A careful examination of the social milieu of teaching and learning will provide insight into the perceptions children construct as well as the processes by which perceptions are constructed.

The study may yield a number of contributions to both research and practice in the area of reading. For researchers the study has methodological significance in that it illustrates the use of a perspective and related methods not commonly used in reading research. It is likely that in addition to yielding products and providing insight into classroom processes, the study will serve to highlight variables which can be examined in future research. Further, a study of the social contexts of reading adds to the small but growing body of research which examines reading and readers in natural settings. By integrating studies of the external contexts of reading, such as this one, with studies of the internal or cognitive contexts of reading, researchers may establish a more fully developed perspective of the processes of reading and learning to read.

The study will also be of value to practitioners. Detailed descriptions of the studied classroom, the teacher, and the students

may be familiar to many teachers. Teachers may see themselves and their students in the illustrations included throughout the report of the study. The recognizability of many features of the studied classroom contributes to the consciousness-raising value of the study. That is, the study may help teachers become aware of the dynamic interplay among classroom participants and the importance of monitoring children's perceptions of classroom phenomena. Attention to children's perceptions can lead to improved instruction, as teachers who become sensitive to children's ways of thinking are better prepared to provide suitable learning experiences. Additionally, insight into children's perceptions of reading can help teachers interpret children's reading behavior. Weinstein (1983) wrote of the practical value of this kind of research,

It is important for teachers to come to know the world of school from the perspective of students. Being aware of students as active interpreters of classroom events forces teachers to examine more closely the effects of their own behavior on the recipients of these interventions. (p. 302)

### Definition of Terms

While research into children's perceptions of reading has traditionally been guided by a cognitive-developmental view, some recent investigators have begun to explore this area from a social-interaction perspective. Those who have assumed a cognitive-developmental view have focused on the internal, mental context of reading and reading instruction, while those who have assumed a social-interaction view have turned their energies to the external, social contexts of reading. From the social-interaction perspective "perceptions of reading" are more

accurately thought of as interactionally constructed "definitions of reading." Below, the terms "cognitive-developmental perspective," "social-interaction perspective," "context," and "definitions of reading" are clarified.

Guthrie and Kirsch's (1984) description of the traditional view of literacy is helpful in characterizing cognitive-developmentally oriented studies of children's perceptions of reading. First, these studies view perceptions as cognitive structures that exist in children's minds. Second, the studies assume that one such structure exists; that is, a child has one kind of perception of reading. Related to this is the assumption that a perception is either correct or incorrect. Further, it is assumed that once individuals acquire the "correct" perception, they utilize the perception in all contexts. In an effort to identify universal patterns in the cognitive development of children's perceptions of reading, researchers have typically focused on identifying perceptions under carefully controlled experimental conditions.

Unlike the cognitive perspective which focuses on "contexts in the mind" (Cazden, 1982, p. 418), the social-interaction perspective focuses on the contexts in which individuals act and the interactions among individuals within those contexts. The theoretical orientation known as symbolic interactionism provides a framework for this approach. A basic principle of this theory is that in order to understand people's behavior, one must discover the meanings or definitions they attribute to the object, process, activity, or individual of interest. Definitions are not viewed as inherent in objects or activities; rather, they arise "out of the social interaction one has with others" (Blumer, 1969, p. 24). Blumer summarized the approach as follows:

Symbolic interactionism . . . sees meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people. The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. Their actions operate to define the thing for the person. Thus, symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact. (pp. 4-5)

From this perspective there is no single abstract, correct definition of reading but many definitions that are actively constructed by individuals as they interact in various settings. "Human experience is such," wrote Denzin (1978), "that the process of defining objects is ever-changing, subject to redefinitions, relocations, and realignments" (p. 7). These definitions determine the ways the individual behaves as a "reader." In order to understand a child's reading behavior, then, one must gain access to his or her definition of reading. Social-interaction studies of children's perceptions of reading attempt to discover interactionally constituted definitions through careful study of the situations in which definitions are created. As Blumer (1969) wrote of symbolic interactionism, this perspective "lodges its problems in [the] natural world, conducts its studies in it, and derives its interpretations from such naturalistic studies" (p. 47).

Context, as it is used in this study, refers to more than the physical setting in which an event occurs. Students of social and communicative environments have developed the notion of context to refer to "the constellation of norms, mutual rights, and obligations that shape social relationships, determine participants' perceptions about what goes on, and influence learning" (Gumperz, 1981, p. 5). Contexts are established as people interact with one another. Together individuals define the situation and rules for appropriate participation.

In the classroom, contexts can change from moment to moment. Children who engage in reading throughout the school day (Griffin, 1977) may construct a number of definitions which serve to guide their behavior.

Definitions of reading refer to the outcomes of the active process children engage in when assigning meaning to the things of their world. From a social-interaction perspective individuals construct definitions through their interactions in social contexts. Characteristics of the context contribute to decisions about "what counts as reading" (Heap, 1980). According to Heap these characteristics include

who the speakers and hearers are; who they take each other to be; how much they know about each other; how much they know that the others know about them; their reasons for interacting, for doing, whatever they are now doing together; their beliefs and assumptions about what they are doing together. (p. 283)

In the multiple and changing contexts of the classroom, children and teachers engage in an ongoing process of defining reading. Awareness of established definitions helps in interpreting and understanding individual and group behavior.

### Design of the Study

Having received approval from the University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects and the county school board, the researcher established an observation schedule with a first-grade teacher who had previously agreed to have the study conducted in her classroom. Observations began during the public school preplanning week in August and continued until the December vacation. The researcher observed 150 hours of classroom activity representing all days of the week and times



during the school day. Observations were focused on children's speech messages about reading, their reading-related behavior, and their use of reading materials. Formal and informal interviews were also conducted throughout the observation period. Those interviewed included the teacher, the children in the low and high reading groups, and the children's kindergarten teachers. In addition, children's cumulative school records were examined.

Data analysis was conducted throughout the study as described by Spradley (1980). Data were organized into categories or domains based on similarities among recorded events. Taxonomies were then constructed to represent children's definitions of reading by drawing data from across domains. Taxonomies, then, contained data from several different domains all of which served to indicate children's definitions of reading.

### Scope of the Study

This study was conducted in one first-grade classroom and focused on the reading-related behavior of approximately half of the students in that room. These students included the nine members of the low reading group and the six members of the high reading group. Observations and interviews were restricted to the first four months of the school year. Had the study been conducted in the same classroom from January until May, different findings may have resulted due to striking curricular and instructional changes which had been implemented. Although the study can provide insight into teaching and learning

processes, specific findings about these children's definitions of reading should not be generalized to other populations.

### Review of the Literature

A review of the literature on children's perceptions of reading provides necessary background for the questions raised in the present study. The review is organized into studies based on the cognitive-developmental perspective and those based on the social-interaction perspective. Following the review, guiding questions for the present study are clarified.

#### Studies of Children's Perceptions of Reading: Cognitive-Developmental Perspective

Downing (1979) noted that reading specialists were slow to recognize the significance of Piaget's (1959) and Vygotsky's (1962) findings about children's language perceptions. Piaget found that children of beginning school age had little awareness of the functions of communication. In the area of written communication, Vygotsky found young children to have only vague ideas about the usefulness of writing. Reading researchers did not begin to examine children's perceptions of reading until the late 1950s. The relevance of their findings for a theory of how children learn to read was not realized for at least another decade.

Using interviews and paper-and-pencil tests, several researchers in the 1950s and 1960s attempted to assess children's perceptions of

reading. In an early study, Edwards (1958) asked questions of second, third, and fourth graders of normal to superior intelligence, assigned to remedial reading classes, to identify their definitions of a "good reader." The subjects shared the perception that good reading was a matter of speed and fluency. Edwards concluded that "children could form a concept of the reading process which is not the same as the one held by the teacher" (p. 24). As a misconception about the nature of good reading could lead to reading difficulties, Edwards recommended that the teacher must "make certain that the child at no time loses sight of the true purpose of reading, the getting of meaning" (p. 241).

Later, Denny and Weintraub (1963) reviewed some of the early studies and concluded that "almost nothing is known of how the beginning reader sees the reading act" (p. 363). The following review of unpublished and unavailable studies by McConkie, Muskopf, and Edwards is based on Denny and Weintraub's report.

McConkie (as cited in Denny & Weintraub, 1963) interviewed 81 kindergarten children to discover their perceptions of reading and possible differences in the perceptions of boys and girls. Denny and Weintraub summarized the findings as follows: "Great variability was found in children's ability to define reading; however, almost all children were able to verbalize some concept about the meaning of reading" (p. 363).

Denny and Weintraub reported that Muskopf examined the relationships between first graders' concept of reading and intelligence, reading achievement, and the instructional approach used by their teachers. After having administered a forced-choice, paper-and-pencil

test to first graders at the end of the school year, Muskopf concluded that there was no significant correlation between a child's concept of reading and his/her reading achievement. He acknowledged the questionable validity of the instrument used to measure concepts of reading.

Finally, Denny and Weintraub described Edward's study of the relationship between fifth-grade children's concept of reading and their reading achievement. Only a slight correlation between the two variables was found. As was the case in the Muskopf study, Edwards pointed out the questionable validity of the self-constructed reading concept instrument.

Having reviewed the meager data available, Denny and Weintraub concluded, "There is a crucial need for more information about the beginning reader's concepts of the reading act and about his insights into himself as a potential reader" (1963, p. 364). They outlined a proposal for an interview study to be conducted with first graders at the beginning and end of the school year.

Weintraub and Denny (1965) reported the findings from beginning of the year interviews of first graders. The researchers grouped children's responses to the question "What is reading?" into seven categories. They found that more than 25% of the subjects "failed to verbalize an intelligible idea of the reading act" (p. 327). The three major response categories were (a) object-related responses (33%), such as "Reading is when you read a book"; (b) vague responses or those in which children said they did not know (27%); and (c) cognitive responses (20%), such as "reading is how to read and how to learn things." The researchers found only minor response differences between boys and

girls. Based on their findings, they suggested that teachers should help children to think of reading as "a thinking, meaningful act" (p. 327).

Denny and Weintraub (1966) also asked beginning first graders the following questions: (a) Do you want to learn to read? Why? (b) What must you do to learn how to read in first grade? They summarized their findings as follows: "A fourth of all those entering first-graders could express no logical, meaningful purpose for learning to read and a third of the children had no idea how it was to be accomplished" (p. 447). The reasons children gave for wanting to learn to read included (a) wanting to read for themselves and to others; (b) wanting to achieve a goal, such as "become smart"; (c) identifying with someone who was a reader; and (d) placing a value on reading, such as, "It's fun." In response to the second question, the majority of responses were placed in an "I don't know"/vague response category. The others were obedience-oriented ("Do what the teacher says"), other-directed ("Teacher will show us how"), or self-directed ("Read to myself"). The researchers did not draw conclusions from this study which was designed to be exploratory and descriptive.

Reid's (1966) study of 12 five-year-old children in Scotland explored the development of reading and writing concepts during the first year of schooling. She interviewed subjects after two, five, and nine months in school, each time asking a different set of questions. Her finding that "reading . . . is a mysterious activity, to which [children] come with only the vaguest of expectancies" (p. 60) was replicated with a group of children in England (Downing, 1970, 1971-1972). Believing

that the reproduction form of response required by Reid might be difficult for young children, Downing (1970) added two procedures to his study of 13 four- and five-year-old children. First, Downing interviewed the subjects after two months of school. Following the interview he had subjects respond to questions about concrete stimuli such as color photographs. For instance, subjects were asked to sort photographs into "reading" and "not reading" categories. In the final task, subjects were presented with auditory stimuli and asked yes/no questions about the stimuli. For the first set of stimuli, subjects were to say "yes" if they heard a word and "no" if what they heard was not a word. For the second set of stimuli, they repeated the procedure for the concept "sound." Downing concluded that, indeed, young children have a vague notion of the purpose of reading and of the activities involved in reading. Concerning the methodology utilized, Downing concluded that children demonstrated more advanced ability in the presence of concrete objects than in the interview situation.

Downing (1969) was motivated to pursue investigations of children's perceptions of reading by his conviction that "children's thoughts about reading, their notions or conceptions of its purpose and nature, present the most fundamental and significant problems for the teacher of reading" (p. 217). Downing and his colleagues (Evanechko, Ollila, Downing, & Braun, 1973) developed an instrument to measure reading readiness and to determine the best group of subtests for predicting end of first grade reading achievement. The battery was administered to 97 first-grade children. The four tested areas included concept of the reading task, perceptual ability, linguistic competence, and

cognitive functioning. It was found that performance on subtests in all four areas predicted success in reading. The authors further contended that for a readiness test to serve a diagnostic function, it should have a range of subtests representing the four general areas cited above.

Blanton and Mason (1970) investigated the relationship between knowledge about reading and later achievement. These researchers found a significant relationship between 5 year olds' scores on the Individual Reading Interest Survey and their scores on the Wide Range Achievement Test. They suggested that teachers must "ascertain what information and beliefs about reading are held by their students before blindly plunging into reading readiness activities or reading instruction" (p. 45).

Following the development and testing of their first reading readiness survey, Downing and his colleagues decided to revise and extend the subtests in the original battery to create a new test that would focus exclusively on children's conceptions of literacy. Ayers and Downing (1982) reported on the development of the new instrument, the Linguistic Awareness in Reading Readiness (LARR) Test (Downing, Ayers, & Schaeffer, 1982). Reliability and validity were established by administering the LARR Test to kindergarten children and following up in first grade with a test of reading achievement. The LARR Test was found to be a significant predictor of later reading achievement.

In other studies, Downing, Ollila, and Oliver (1975, 1977) investigated the relationship between children's reading concepts and their pre-school experiences. Results of studies with Canadian Indian

children (1975) and with children representing a range of socio-economic levels (1977) led the researchers to conclude that "experience at home is an important factor in learning the purposes of reading and writing" (Downing, 1979, p. 12).

In a study of Native American Headstart children's language concepts, Oliver (1975) reached a conclusion similar to that expressed by Downing et al. Oliver found that home experiences seemed to be related to children's reading and writing concepts. Based on task performance and interview data from 78 three-, four-, and five-year-old children, Oliver suggested that "experiences with books, learning activities, watching television, and interacting with other children seem to have had more effect on concept building than did age" (pp. 868-869).

During the same time period in which Downing conducted his earliest studies, Johns (1970) was asking children the question, "What is reading?" Over three years he asked the question of children in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. Their responses led Johns to suggest "that a better understanding of reading . . . should be acquired by elementary children" (p. 657). He then posed the question, "Would it not be beneficial, then, to tell children what reading is all about?" (p. 648).

In his next investigation of children's concepts of reading, Johns (1972) explored the relationship between reading concepts and reading achievement. Fifty-three fourth graders were interviewed individually, and their responses to the question "What is reading?" were recorded. Responses were then classified into one of the following five categories: (a) no response, "I don't know," or a vague response; (b) classroom procedures, such as, "You read a story and do workbook



pages"; (c) word recognition, such as, "Saying words"; (d) meaning or understanding, such as, "It's when you read a story and know what it's about"; and (e) meaning and word recognition, such as, "You learn the words and read the story and you're supposed to know what it means." Reading achievement was determined by administering vocabulary and comprehension subtests of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests Survey D. A significant positive correlation was found between the children's concept of reading and their reading achievement. Johns concluded that the results were encouraging and that children's concepts of reading warranted further investigation. "It may be," wrote Johns, "that one of the contributing factors to children's reading achievement is their understanding of the reading process" (p. 57).

In an effort to compare the concepts of reading held by good and poor readers, Johns (1974) asked 103 fourth and fifth graders, "What is reading?" Responses were then sorted into the five categories outlined above. The comprehension subtest of the Gates-MacGinitie Survey D was administered to identify good and poor readers. Good readers were those children who scored a year or more above grade placement; poor readers scored a year or more below grade placement. Johns found that good readers gave a significantly greater number of meaningful definitions of reading (in categories three, four, and five) than poor readers. He identified several questions needing careful reflection in the future, among them, "What should a meaningful concept of reading include?" and "How should children's concepts of reading be explored?" (p. 60).

In a subsequent study Johns and Ellis (1976) investigated the views of reading held by 1,655 students in grades one through eight.

Children were individually interviewed and asked the following questions: (a) "What is reading?" (b) "What do you do when you read?" and (c) "If someone didn't know how to read, what would you tell him/her that he/she would need to learn?" (p. 119). Children's taped responses were assigned to the same a priori categories listed above. Responses for each question were analyzed for general trends and differences in sex and grade. The researchers identified five major conclusions:

1. Many students have little or no understanding of the reading process.
2. Older students have a somewhat better understanding of the reading process than younger students.
3. There were few sex differences in the data. However, when differences existed it was revealed that boys gave more vague or irrelevant responses than girls. Also, girls appeared to be more aware of the fact that decoding and meaning were essential for reading.
4. Most of the meaningful responses described reading as a decoding process. It may be that teachers are over-emphasizing decoding or "sounding out" strategies to the exclusion of the role meaning plays in reading.
5. Many children have a very restricted view of reading. They described reading as an activity occurring in the classroom or school environment which utilized a textbook. (pp. 125-126)

As a practical implication of their findings Johns and Ellis (1976) recommended that teachers help students "grasp a worthwhile concept of reading" (p. 126). For researchers the authors recommended investigations of the effects of teaching children a concept of reading on their reading achievement. Further, they suggested that a variety of techniques be utilized to explore children's concepts of reading. Their examples included in-depth interviews and questionnaires.

Tovey's (1976) interview study of children's perceptions of reading assumed a different focus from the studies which preceded it. Tovey designed his questions to reflect several features of a psycholinguistic

approach to reading. He was specifically interested in children's perceptions of reading as a silent process, as a process of deriving meaning from written language, as a predictive process, and as a process utilizing three cue systems. During 15- to 20-minute individual interview sessions Tovey questioned 30 children, five each from grades one through six. His findings were summarized as follows: (a) Children perceived reading as an oral activity; (b) One-fifth indicated that reading had something to do with meaning, while the largest percentage spoke of reading in terms of decoding; (c) The majority of children expressed the view that each letter and word must be processed to obtain meaning; and (d) Most of the children perceived the graphophonic cue system as the only strategy for decoding print. Tovey concluded that children's responses reflected the way they had been taught to think about reading. The findings imply "that teachers are using the 'word recognition equals reading' model" (p. 540). He advocated that children be encouraged to use psycholinguistic concepts and processes as they learn to derive meaning from text.

In a study of preschool children's print awareness, Hiebert (1981) used a different methodology from earlier studies and found different results from those studies (e.g., Weintraub & Denny, 1965; Reid, 1966). Hiebert examined two areas: (a) children's reading readiness skills, such as visual discrimination; and (b) their knowledge of processes involved in and purposes of print. Her objectives were to establish developmental patterns of print-related concepts and skills and to determine interrelationships among the concepts and skills. To tap children's knowledge of print processes and purposes, Hiebert designed

tasks which utilized meaningful stimuli in concrete situations. For example, in one task the investigator read orally from a book and then asked the child to name the activity he/she had just observed. Unlike earlier researchers, then, Hiebert presented her 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children with concrete reading-related tasks in meaningful contexts.

Hiebert found that "when exposed to print within meaningful contexts, children in the present study seemed quite aware of print and its use" (1981, p. 254). While Hiebert's purpose was to identify developmental patterns in print awareness, she was particularly sensitive to the impact of socio-cultural factors on the developmental process. In addition to the influence of meaningful contexts, Hiebert pointed out the impact of time and place on opportunities to learn about print. The popularity of Sesame Street and other children's television programs, the proliferation of signs and labels in a child's environment, and the abundance of children's books may have contributed to the greater awareness of print demonstrated by her subjects than subjects in the 1950s and early 1960s. Pointing to her findings that readiness skills and concepts appear to develop in an integrated fashion as children accumulate experiences with print, Hiebert advocated that "information used to structure reading experiences should come from careful documentation of what children actually do in naturalistic and school settings" (p. 257).

In an effort to understand why poverty children so often had difficulties with beginning reading, Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) interviewed Argentinean first graders at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. The authors clarified their perspective by noting,

Obviously we are aware of the presence of factors external to schooling that are involved in failures, but we believe that there are also internal factors--directly related to the external ones--that stem as much from the conception of learning as from the objective purposes the school hopes to achieve. (p. 90)

The authors' view was that children construct conceptualizations about the nature of written language just as they construct understandings of other phenomena of their world. This Piagetian perspective guided the authors in identifying developmental stages in children's conceptions of a variety of features of reading. Among the areas examined were children's understanding of letters and punctuation marks and their understanding of the relationship between drawing and print. Children's responses to a variety of tasks and questions indicated that their conceptions of the nature of reading represented a range of levels of cognitive development. The authors pointed out that school instruction tends to be based on adult definitions of reading concepts and processes. As a result, only those children who have achieved more advanced levels of conceptualization can benefit from traditional instruction. Other children "will have more difficulty reconciling adult proposals with their own hypotheses about written texts" (p. 89). Recognition of the existence of differing conceptualizations requires that teachers rethink some of their most taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching. For example, before attempting to teach children a set of "easy" sight words, a teacher must ask, "Easy for whom, easy from whose point of view, from whose definition of easy?" (p. 51).

Saracho (1983) conducted a study of children's perceptions of reading to identify factors that influence the reading performance of

bilingual bicultural children. This researcher's goal was to analyze 4- through 8-year-old Mexican American children's perceptions in terms of their cognitive styles. She found that "young children in the study were insensitive to or unaware of many important dimensions of reading" and suggested, "Since knowledge about reading is necessary for the acquisition of reading skills, educators may need to incorporate programs to teach young children to realize that the main purpose of reading is to abstract meaning from the written word" (p. 217).

Saracho's analysis of developmental trends in perceptions revealed that children's perceptions of reading were "more closely related to their experience with reading than to anything else" (p. 217), including developmental shifts. She recommended that teachers use information about children's cognitive styles as well as their perceptions of the reading process to improve instruction.

A recent study investigated the effects of instruction on kindergarten children's perceptions of the nature and purpose of reading. Mayfield (1983) used a code systems approach to provide children with 25 minutes of daily instruction for 20 days. This approach was designed to help children explore code or symbol systems in their environment, to learn concepts and vocabulary related to code systems, and to consider the uses of code systems. Pre- and post-treatment measures of children's perceptions of reading were obtained through interview questions and performance on several subtests of the Evanekho et al. (1973) reading readiness test. Mayfield's findings indicated that code system instruction led to improved, more adult-like perceptions of reading. Regarding methods of identifying children's perceptions,

Mayfield concluded that interview questions alone were probably not useful in obtaining accurate perceptions. Her observation that children's responses to interview questions were frequently contradicted by their performance on test items led her to point out that children might understand a concept without being able to verbalize it. Mayfield recommended that instruments designed to identify perceptions of reading be improved and that code systems instruction be integrated into kindergarten programs.

The reviewed studies have contributed to our knowledge of children's perceptions of reading. It is becoming increasingly clear that children's concepts of reading are positively related to their reading achievement (Blanton & Mason, 1970; Evanechko, Ollila, Downing, & Braun, 1973; Johns, 1972; Johns & Ellis, 1976). A number of the studies have indicated that children's concepts of reading are strikingly different from teachers' concepts (Edwards, 1958; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Johns, 1972; Weintraub & Denny, 1965). Many children seem to perceive of reading as a decoding process (Johns & Ellis, 1976; Tovey, 1976), while their teachers believe that text comprehension is the goal of reading. Home experiences with reading have been found to be related to children's perceptions (Downing, Ollila, & Oliver, 1975, 1977; Oliver, 1975; Saracho, 1983), and developmental stages in children's perceptions of reading have been identified (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982). Although some researchers claimed that young children have a vague notion of the purposes of reading (Downing, 1970, 1971-1972; Reid, 1966), others demonstrated that even preschool children were aware of print uses when presented with tasks in meaningful contexts (Hiebert, 1981).

Despite these contributions there remain gaps in our understanding of young readers and their views of reading. For example, we do not know why children develop the perceptions of reading that they do. In addition, we do not know whether children use one perception of reading in all settings or whether, as suggested by Hiebert (1981), their perceptions are related to the context at hand. We also do not know why there seem to be differences in the perceptions of good and poor readers. Furthermore, we know little about the role of children's perceptions of reading in the ongoing life of the classroom. These remaining questions are due in part to the methods which have been used to investigate children's perceptions. Most of the reviewed studies had several features in common. One, they all attempted to identify children's understanding of reading at a particular moment in time rather than over time. Two, they all relied heavily on interviewing and paper-and-pencil tests. Three, they all removed subjects from natural settings. In an effort to identify and to generalize children's thoughts about reading, the contexts in which thinking occurred tended to be neglected. When context was addressed, it was found to be a significant factor in children's perceptions of reading (Hiebert, 1981).

A small group of recent studies has begun to address some of the noted gaps in previous research findings. In the following section a second and much smaller set of studies of children's perceptions of reading is reviewed. These studies represent a perspective which focuses on the contexts in which behavior takes place.



Studies of Children's Perceptions of Reading:  
Social-Interaction Perspective

A growing body of naturalistic studies have explored reading from a social-interaction perspective. For instance, researchers have studied the operation of reading groups (e.g., McDermott, 1976), the development of literacy in children (e.g., Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983), and the experiences children have with reading throughout the school day (Griffin, 1977). However, very few researchers have attempted to study children's perceptions of reading from this perspective. In the following section these few studies are reviewed.

Roth's (1980, 1983) 10-month study of 10 children in two first-grade classrooms focused on the "meanings" or "sense children come to make of reading . . . over time" (1983, p. 5). Participant observation and interviewing were used to collect data before, during, and after the first-grade year. Through her analysis of the teachers' and students' behavior patterns, Roth discovered the shared definition of reading developed in each classroom. In one room "reading is a teacher-determined task which: 1) needs to be completed within a given time period and 2) entails remembering what is read in order to repeat it for the teacher upon request" (1983, p. 10). In the second classroom "reading is a teacher-determined task which is done in order to: 1) understand the meaning of what is read and 2) share how it relates to personal experience" (1983, p. 11). Although before-school interviews indicated that children eagerly anticipated learning how to read in the first grade, as the year progressed children began to see reading in terms of required tasks, especially paper-and-pencil activities. According

to Roth (1983), "One of the most telling indications of the impact of schooling . . . is seen in the way the children take on their teachers' definitions of reading" (p. 11).

The relationship between teachers' behavior and students' conceptions of reading comprehension was the focus of a study by Mosenthal (1983). More specifically, Mosenthal wondered whether differences in the ways teachers organized reading instruction influenced the ways students came to understand appropriate classroom comprehension.

Two fourth-grade teachers representing distinct teaching ideologies were identified. The first reflected an academic ideology. This teacher's instruction was characterized by features such as close adherence to the teacher's manual and frequent rejections of student responses drawn from sources other than the specific text at hand. The second teacher's instruction reflected a cognitive-developmental ideology. This teacher tended to adapt and modify the teacher's manual and was likely to accept answers based on students' prior knowledge or on past or future text. To ascertain the students' definitions of appropriate reading comprehension, story-related questions were constructed for each teacher's low, middle, and high reading groups. Once each group finished reading a section of a story aloud, the teachers asked a set of experimenter-constructed questions. The students' responses were classified according to the sources used to answer them. For instance, was the response based on prior knowledge, prior text, or current text? When a response appeared to be based on prior knowledge, the subject was interviewed to determine whether this was in fact the case. Responses were also categorized according to whether they were

identical to text, inferrable from text, or an embellishment of the text. Comparisons were then made between students' responses in the two classrooms.

Mosenthal found that significant differences existed between the kinds of responses given by students in the two classrooms. Students' responses reflected their definitions of reading comprehension, definitions they shared with their teachers. Mosenthal summarized as follows:

The importance of this study is that it demonstrates the need to consider more than text or reader variables in describing how children acquire reading competence. . . . the study demonstrates that teacher ideology, as reflected in the organization of classroom social situation, is an important variable influencing children's reading acquisition. (p. 546)

In a study of junior high students, Bloome (1982) investigated in-school and out-of-school contexts in which students engaged in reading. His purpose was to discover the definitions of reading constructed by students as they interacted in various contexts. So as to avoid imposing his own definitions on participants' behavior, Bloome (1980) considered reading to be indicated by an activity meeting any of the following criteria:

1. defined as reading by participants
2. eye gaze in the direction of print
3. an instructional lesson defined as a reading lesson
4. the potential use by participants of printed symbols to communicate
5. communication about something read or to be read. (p. 6)

Bloome stressed that the criteria were "merely signals that a reading activity may be occurring" (p. 6).

Bloome collected data over an 11-month period through the use of ethnographic techniques such as participant observation, videotaping,

and ethnographic interviews. Although a complete description of findings is forthcoming, some information is already available (Bloome, 1982). For example, a close analysis of students' postural configurations revealed a continuum of reading contexts called the social-isolated reading continuum. One end of the continuum, isolated reading, was typical of reading done inside the classroom. Isolated reading was characterized by one student interacting with one text. Bloome found that "activities officially labeled READING seemed to be primarily 'isolated reading'" (p. 22). The other end of the continuum, social reading, was characterized by several students interacting with a single text and one another simultaneously. This kind of reading was most often found outside of the classroom. Bloome suggested the possibility that people may define reading as a social activity involving "the structuring of relationships between people, the establishing of norms for participation, etc." (p. 25). According to Bloome, "reading" may be an even more complex phenomenon than investigators have thought. He suggested that insight into the ways in which teachers and learners define reading may have implications for instruction, evaluation, and future research.

The three reviewed studies focused on identifying interactionally constructed definitions of reading. While Roth and Mosenthal concentrated on elementary-aged children who adopted their teachers' definition of reading, Bloome studied junior high students as they defined reading in multiple contexts. These studies have begun to fill in some of the gaps left by the earlier studies. For example, they provided insight into why children develop the perceptions of reading that they

do. In addition, the Bloome (1982) study provided evidence that children constructed multiple definitions of reading as they interacted in various contexts. Nevertheless, questions about children's definitions of reading remain. It is still not clear whether children use one or more than one definition of reading at a given stage in their development. We also do not know how to account for the differences in the perceptions of good and poor readers. Additionally, the three reviewed studies suggest important questions about children's definitions of reading in the classroom setting. Is there just one definition of reading constructed in a classroom? If not, what kinds of definitions are constructed? Do all classroom participants construct the same definitions of reading? What consequences do children's definitions have for their success or failure as readers?

The purpose of the present study is to address some of the unanswered questions in this area of research. The following broad questions served to guide the investigation:

1. What are the definitions of reading constructed by members of the low and high reading groups in one first-grade classroom?
2. Are there patterns in children's definitions within and across ability groups?

In the following chapters the methodology, findings, and implications of the study are discussed. In Chapter II, the methodology is described. Chapters III and IV present the study's findings. Conclusions and implications are discussed in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER II METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methods were used to investigate first-grade children's perceptions of reading in this study. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) outlined several features which characterize this kind of inquiry: (a) Research is conducted within the particular setting under study; (b) The researcher is the main research instrument; (c) Data are descriptive; (d) The focus is on ongoing processes rather than products; (e) Data are analyzed inductively; and (f) The researcher is concerned with understanding the perspectives of the people under study. The approach may also be called "naturalistic," as the objective was "to illuminate social realities, human perceptions, and organizational realities untainted by the intrusion of formal measurement procedures or reordering the situation to fit the preconceived notions of the investigation" (Owens, 1982, p. 7). A qualitative, naturalistic research approach can yield "a literal description that figuratively transports the readers into the situation with a sense of insight, understanding, and illumination not only of the facts or the events in the case, but also the texture, the quality, and the power of the context as the participants in the situation experienced it" (Owens, 1982, p. 8). Wilcox (1982) described qualitative research as "a naturalistic, observational, descriptive, contextual, open-ended, and in-depth

approach to doing research" (p. 462). Why use such an approach to study children's definitions of reading?

In this study the researcher assumed a social-interaction perspective grounded in Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionist theory. According to this perspective, "objects are social products in that they are formed and transformed by the defining process that takes place in social interaction" (Blumer, 1969, p. 69). Reading, then, is not an abstract construct with inherent characteristics, but a product of the interactions of individuals in various contexts. In order to understand children's definitions of reading, the researcher must closely examine the social interactions within which definitions are constructed. According to Denzin (1978), "Interactionists regard human interaction as their basic source of data" (p. 7). A social-interactional investigation of children's perceptions of reading must focus on the contexts in which children have opportunities to work out the meanings of reading. A qualitative research approach provides a methodology compatible with the social-interaction perspective and suitable for the investigation of interactionally constituted definitions of reading.

According to Blumer (1969), "No theorizing, however ingenious, and no observance of scientific protocol, however meticulous, are substitutes for developing a familiarity with what is actually going on in the sphere of life under study" (p. 39). Blumer advocated the disciplined use of exploration and inspection in the examination of the social world. He conceived of the naturalistic method as the methodological perspective of symbolic interactionism. The following quote summarizes Blumer's research approach:

Exploration and inspection, representing respectively depiction and analysis, constitute the necessary procedure in direct examination of the empirical social world. They comprise what is sometimes spoken of as "naturalistic" investigation--investigation that is directed to a given empirical world in its natural, ongoing character instead of to a simulation of such a world, or to an abstraction from it . . . or to a substitute for the world in the form of a present image of it. Naturalistic inquiry, embracing the dual procedures of exploration and inspection, is clearly necessary in the scientific study of human group life. (pp. 46-47)

In this study, interactions within a first-grade classroom were explored and inspected through the use of qualitative, naturalistic methods. These methods were borrowed from the disciplines of anthropology and sociology and could be characterized as ethnographic. In this chapter the researcher's methods and procedures are described. Included are discussions of the setting, the research model and each of its components, the issue of validity, and researcher qualifications and biases. The first topic, the setting, is described in three sections: the selection of the site, gaining entry to the site, and a description of the site.

### The Setting

#### Selection of Research Site

The study was conducted in one first-grade classroom. The selection of the classroom was guided by several criteria established on the basis of project objectives. The criteria for classroom selection were as follows: (a) a first-grade classroom, to ensure that all children would be engaged in formal reading instruction from the beginning of



the school year; (b) a classroom in which children had opportunities to interact and read throughout the school day; and (c) a teacher who was comfortable having an observer in the classroom. An additional consideration, though not a requirement, was that the teacher and researcher already be acquainted. According to Lofland (1971), access to desired information is more easily gained when the researcher uses "pre-existing relations of trust" as a route into the setting, rather than 'going in cold'" (p. 95). It was believed that a harmonious researcher-teacher relationship would be more easily established if a friendly rapport already existed between the two. The researcher was acquainted with the first-grade teachers in five public schools. The selected teacher, Mrs. Saunders,<sup>1</sup> met all criteria and was one with whom the researcher had a friendly rapport.

#### Gaining Entry to the Site

Once the teacher was selected, the researcher visited her in her classroom to make an appointment for an initial meeting. The meeting took place in the spring. The researcher's goals for this meeting were to explain project purposes and plans and to ask Mrs. Saunders' permission to conduct the study in her classroom. A brief outline of the proposed project had been prepared and was shared with the teacher (see Appendix A). By discussing the study in general terms, the researcher attempted to avoid influencing project outcomes. The lengthy data collection period also minimized the possibility that this initial

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<sup>1</sup>The teacher's name and all students' names are pseudonyms.

discussion would have an impact on study findings. In addition to explaining guiding questions and research methods, the researcher explained her reasons for choosing the classroom. During the initial meeting the researcher also described what her role would be in the class. She explained that although she would be spending much of her time writing and asking questions, she would make time to talk with Mrs. Saunders to answer her questions and discuss concerns about the study. The researcher also assured Mrs. Saunders that she would have access to the study's findings. The teacher listened and responded enthusiastically during the meeting. She expressed great interest in the researcher's questions and agreed that they were important to investigate. She said she was "honored" that her classroom had been selected, and she would be happy to be involved in the study.

On the same morning the researcher met with the school principal to explain the proposed study and to get his informal permission to conduct the study at his school. A copy of the project outline was shared with the principal. He agreed to the plan and reminded the researcher that the project had to be approved by the district office before it could be implemented.

Two sets of paperwork were required for official approval of the project. In order to gain entry to the classroom, an application to conduct research in the district public schools was submitted to the school district office. A description of the proposed project and a parental consent letter were submitted to the University's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. By the end of June the project was approved by the school district's director of research and by the

University Committee. Written parental consent was obtained from all parents in September. The researcher contacted the teacher to inform her of the project's approval and to make plans for meeting during the public schools' preplanning week in August.

The purposes of the preplanning week meeting were to remind the teacher of the objectives and methods of the study and to interview her concerning her decisions and plans for reading instruction. During this meeting the researcher established that she would observe in the classroom for 10 hours each week until the December holiday. Although the teacher claimed that she did not need to have an observation schedule because she was accustomed to being observed, the researcher promised to tell her ahead of time when she would be observing. The researcher asked the teacher's advice concerning the best way to obtain parents' signatures on consent forms. The teacher suggested that the researcher attend and speak at the first parents' meeting in early September at which time she could introduce herself and explain her project. Finally, it was agreed during this meeting that the researcher would come to observe the first day of school.

#### Description of the Site

The study was conducted in a public elementary school in a large southeastern city. The 30-year-old school was in a neighborhood that had been characterized until recently as middle class. In recent years the growing number of rental units and the increasingly transient population have caused some city residents to consider the community to be

lower-middle class. The 600-member student body was 70% white and 30% black and represented families in middle to lower socio-economic groups. The majority of students were bused to and from school.

In the school there were four classrooms for each grade, kindergarten through fifth. Although there was not a gymnasium, there was an art room, music room, media center, auditorium, and a cafeteria. The following full-time support teachers were on the faculty: curriculum specialist, varying exceptionalities teacher, gifted teacher, guidance counselor, music teacher, media specialist, and physical education teacher. A one-half time art teacher and a four-fifths time speech teacher were also available.

The studied classroom filled half of a large space which also housed a kindergarten. A playhouse and a bookshelf formed the partial barrier between the two classrooms. Children and adults frequently passed from one classroom to the next to borrow materials, to send messages, to use the bathroom, and to teach or join a lesson. As shown in Figure 1, the classroom was typical of many primary rooms. A chalkboard lined one wall, while individual "cubbies" lined another, and jalousie windows covered the third. Children sat at individual desks, the organization of which was shifted by the teacher several times during the first half of the school year. Her preferred plan consisted of three groups of desks, with the desks in each group pushed together forming a single rectangular surface. The seating arrangement was determined by friendships and work habits rather than by ability groups.

Although children spent much of the school day at their desks, they worked and played at other locations, too. Reading groups met

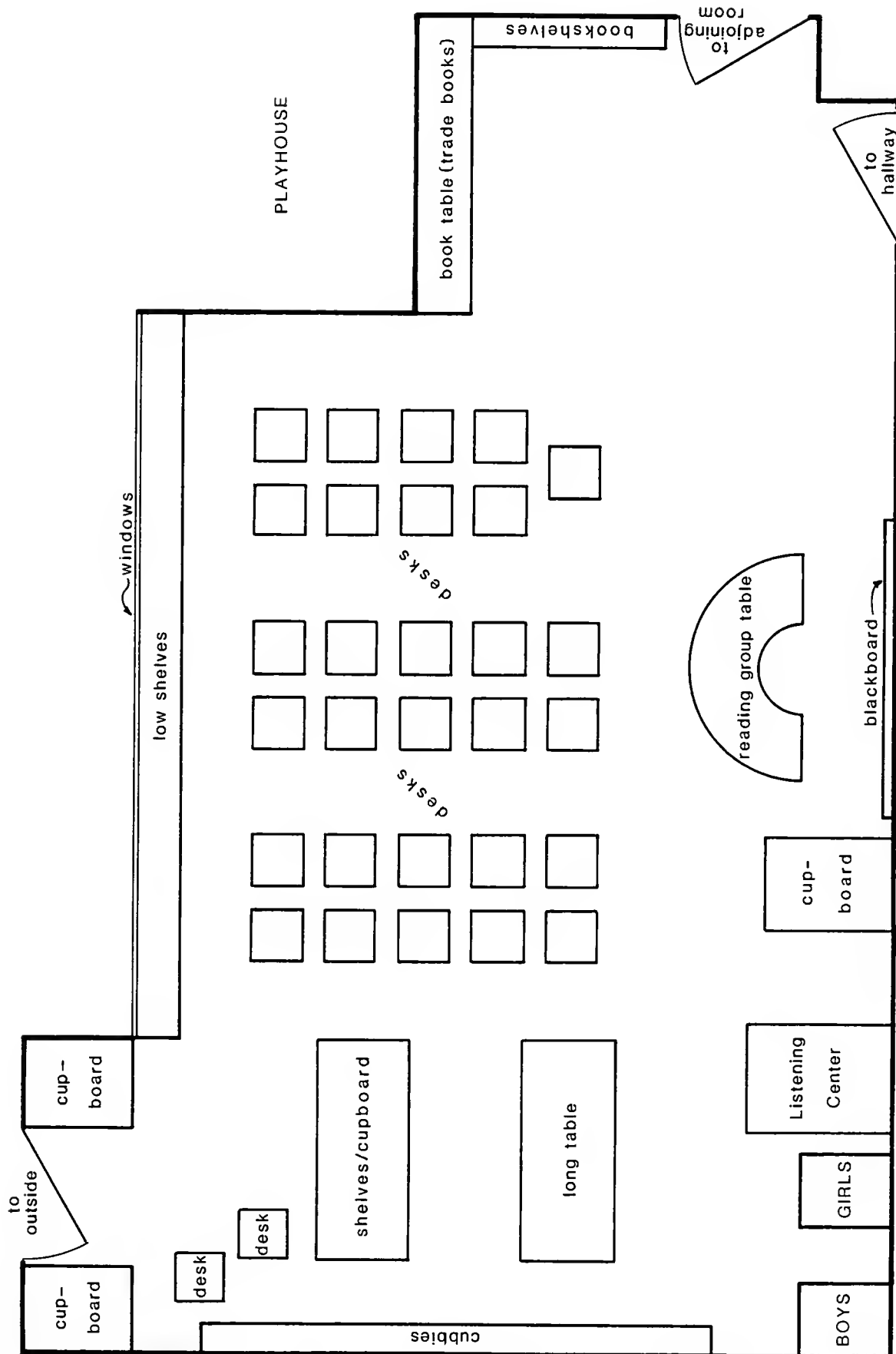


Figure 1. Classroom Map

daily at a semi-circular reading table. This table was in front of the chalkboard and also served as the teacher's desk. Sometimes children were permitted to work outside at a picnic table. A quiet area in the back corner of the room was used as a work place and also as a play area, particularly by girls playing school. A listening center consisting of a table with an audio tape player and individual earphones was often used by children who listened to a tape-recorded story while reading along in the book. On a long table by the listening center there were sometimes art materials which children could use after finishing their work. Often children used the floor to play games and put puzzles together. The playhouse was a popular choice for some of the girls. During free play periods, many children stayed at their desks or gathered around one child's desk to draw, read, and play games.

In the classroom, children's artwork was displayed more often than their academic work. Seasonal and holiday art projects resulted in decorations which hung on windows, bulletin boards, and the playhouse. On a section of one wall the teacher had painted a math facts rocket. Different levels of the rocket represented different levels of addition and subtraction facts. When a child could say all the facts for a particular level, his/her nametag was raised to that level of the rocket. The alphabet written in the county-adopted handwriting style was posted above the chalkboard. Commercially produced posters representing the short vowel sounds were hung on the chalkboard and later on the playhouse.

To acquaint the reader with the operation of the classroom, a typical day is summarized. The teacher arrived at school at 7:30 A.M.

From this time until the children came in at 9:00 A.M. she planned, talked with the teacher next door, and took care of other school responsibilities. Attendance and lunch count were taken after the children came in. The "line leaders" for the day took the attendance and lunch information to the office and cafeteria. During this time the rest of the children read a book, drew, or talked quietly with one another. Then, the teacher introduced the children to their morning work. Typically they had five tasks or "smilies" required of them. Some smilies required instruction while others were assigned as practice exercises. Throughout the morning the teacher met with each of the four reading groups. While a reading group met, the other students worked on their smilies. When children had completed all their smilies, they turned in folders containing all assignments. Once work was turned in, children could choose an activity such as reading, drawing, a special art project, a puzzle, or any number of educational games. During the morning the class left at least once for half an hour to go to a special class such as physical education, music, or art. Twenty minutes of outdoor freeplay occurred before 11 A.M. During this time the teacher checked the work in children's folders. From 11:00-11:30 the teacher taught a math lesson. After math the class went to lunch.

Returning from lunch at 12:10, the next 45 minutes were used by the children to correct errors in their morning work and by the teacher to meet with individual children who needed extra help. The teacher announced daily the names of the children who were "superstars," that is, those children who completed all their smilies without errors. The remaining two hours of the school day were filled with activities such

as sharing time, a teacher-read story, a whole-class phonics lesson, a special class, outdoor freeplay, and a science or social studies activity. The children were dismissed at 3 P.M., and the teacher left around 5:00 P.M.

The teacher, Mrs. Saunders, was a white woman who had taught for about 15 years in two states. She had a master's degree in early childhood education and, during the course of the study, she applied and was accepted to a specialist program, also in early childhood. She had taught in private and public schools, in primary grades and in pre-kindergarten programs. Having taught in a university laboratory school and a federally funded model program, she was accustomed to working with a variety of adult observers. Mrs. Saunders had taught for nine years in this county and for six years at this school.

In addition to teaching, Mrs. Saunders was involved in professional organizations. She was an active member of the Association for Childhood Education International, helped plan for the organization's conference, and presented a paper at the meeting. Mrs. Saunders was also actively involved in an education honorary organization. Due to her reputation as an effective teacher, she was often invited to speak at meetings and conferences.

Mrs. Saunders was respected and admired on a personal as well as a professional level. During the study it was clear that she had warm relationships with her students and with a number of the other teachers, and she was very popular with student teachers. Her sense of humor and constant optimism added to her popularity with students and peers.

The relationship which developed between Mrs. Saunders and the researcher was trusting and harmonious. Researcher and teacher



conversations covered a wide range of personal and professional topics, some related to project goals, many unrelated. Mrs. Saunders talked openly about her family, difficult periods in her life, personal and professional failures and frustrations, fears and concerns about students, and school gossip. She often asked the researcher if she would come to lunch and once invited her to a colleague's birthday celebration. Her attitude toward the researcher was conveyed in the following remarks she made after the fieldwork period had ended. The researcher had an appointment with the teacher to conduct an interview and began by apologizing for taking up so much of the teacher's time:

Mrs. Saunders: Oh no, you're not! I miss you so much! I love to have you come. You're so interested. You really care about the kids and what they're doing. I loved having you here because there was someone to appreciate what I was doing.

Mrs. Saunders seemed genuinely to enjoy having the researcher in her classroom. Not only was she comfortable being observed, but she appreciated the attention and the opportunity to talk about herself, her teaching, and her students.

There were 27 students in Mrs. Saunders' classroom. Of the 17 girls and 10 boys there were 9 black and 18 white children. Eight children received free lunch and one paid a reduced price. All children had attended kindergarten. The children in the top and the bottom reading groups were the focus of the study. The groups were determined by children's performance on the reading subtests of the Metropolitan Readiness Test, the Metropolitan Achievement Test, and by their scores on criterion-referenced tests of the county-adopted basal reader series. The six white girls in the top group began the year in the first of the

two second-grade books. In the bottom reading group there were nine children--two white boys, one white girl, three black boys, and three black girls. This group began the year reading in the first pre-primer. Although the two groups used different reading books and workbooks, they used some of the same reading-related materials. These included a phonics workbook and worksheets based on weekly "basic reading vocabulary" words.

### Research Methods and Procedures

#### Overview

Children's interactionally constructed definitions of reading were explored and inspected through a qualitative and naturalistic research approach. Spradley (1979, 1980), an anthropologist, has organized and synthesized traditional ethnographic methods into a systematic set of procedures called the Developmental Research Sequence. He referred to the research sequence as a methodology designed for the investigation of meaning. Spradley's research model was adapted for use in this study, the goal of which was to discover the definitions or "meanings" children made of reading (Roth, 1980, 1983) in one first-grade classroom.

The ethnographic research model is cyclic rather than linear in nature. That is, unlike the traditional, experimental researcher who identifies hypotheses, collects data to test the hypotheses, analyzes the data, and draws conclusions, the qualitative researcher utilizing this model engages in a cyclical process of questioning, collecting data,

recording data, and analyzing data. Throughout the course of the study, the sequence of questioning, collecting, recording, and analyzing was repeated. Questions served to direct observations and from observations emerged questions to provide further direction. Data analysis was not the culmination of the research act, but an integral part of the research cycle.

### Asking Ethnographic Questions

Questioning is a critical element of the research cycle because the questions the researcher asks direct data collection and lead him/her closer to the perspectives of the people being studied. Not only are questions posed prior to the study, but new questions are formulated throughout the research period. A characteristic of this research approach is that it begins without precise hypotheses which may "close off prematurely the process of discovery of that which is significant in the setting" (Wilcox, 1982, p. 459). While attempting to transcend the influence of "preconceived ideas" which may bias the outcome of the study, the researcher formulates "foreshadowed problems" to direct his investigation. Malinowski (1922) distinguished between preconceived ideas and foreshadowed problems as follows: "Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker, and these problems are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies" (p. 9). In this study two broad questions were posed to provide a general framework for the research:

1. What are the definitions of reading constructed by members of the low and high reading groups in one first-grade classroom?
2. Are there patterns in children's definitions within and across ability groups?

While foreshadowed problems served to guide the overall direction of the study, other kinds of questions were asked during the course of the research. These questions included descriptive questions, structural questions, and contrast questions. Each kind of question led to a different kind of observation and was associated with a different level of data analysis. The three types of questions are defined as follows:

1. Descriptive questions were asked during the earliest observations when the researcher had little knowledge of the life of the classroom. These general questions included "What is the daily schedule?" "Who are the people in this classroom?" "How is the physical space utilized?" and "When and where do children read?" These questions led to descriptive observations which enabled the researcher to develop an initial description of the unfamiliar setting.

2. Structural questions were asked following initial data analysis. The purpose of asking structural questions was to add depth to identified categories of behaviors, objects, places, and people in the classroom. For instance, it was found that the teacher asked many questions of students throughout the school day. The structural question posed by the researcher was "What are all the kinds of questions the teacher asks?" The researcher also observed that children read in various places in the classroom. The resulting structural question was "What are all the places in which children read?" These and other structural questions were asked repeatedly, the goal being to discover as many

answers as possible. In searching for answers the researcher made focused observations. This type of observation enabled the researcher to narrow the scope of the research and to discover the larger and smaller categories existing in the classroom.

3. Contrast questions were posed following further data analysis. After focused observations had filled in elements in the categories of interest, such as the kinds of questions the teacher asked, contrast questions were asked to identify differences among the elements. For example, among the kinds of questions teachers asked were quiz questions ("What sound does that 'e' make?") and comprehension-check questions ("Why would there be a safe in a bank?"). To ensure that the two kinds of questions were distinct elements in the category of teacher questions, the researcher asked the contrast question, "How are these kinds of questions different?" The question led to selective observations in which the researcher searched the fieldnotes and conducted additional field observations looking for differences between the two kinds of questions.

Spradley (1980) suggested that the three types of questions and observations be thought of as a funnel. The descriptive questions and observations are "the broad rim of the funnel" (p. 128); structural questions and focused observations narrow the scope of the study and are represented by the narrower part of the funnel; contrast questions and selective observations are represented by the small, narrow opening at the bottom of the funnel. Ethnographic questions and their related kind of observations are "the basic unit of all ethnographic inquiry" (Spradley, 1980, p. 73). The questions asked determine the type of

observations made; questions and observations shape the course of data collection. What kind of data were collected in this study? What methods did the researcher use to collect data? These questions are addressed in the following section.

### Collecting Ethnographic Data

The researcher's objective was to discover and describe the definitions of reading constructed by first-grade children. Since definitions were not as easily observed as concrete phenomena such as teacher and student questions and the use of reading materials, the researcher utilized other kinds of data as indicators of children's definitions (Barton & Lazarsfeld, 1969; Becker, 1970). According to Spradley (1980), people everywhere make use of three types of information to make inferences about what others know. He summarized, "We observe what people do (cultural behavior); we observe things people make and use such as clothes and tools (cultural artifacts); and we listen to what people say (speech messages)" (p. 10). In this study the researcher used a similar method of collecting evidence and making inferences. Barton and Lazarsfeld (1969) stated the logic behind this practice: "The underlying assumption . . . is that a phenomenon which cannot be directly observed will nevertheless leave traces which, properly interpreted, permit the phenomenon to be identified and studied" (p. 170).

In this study the researcher used children's speech messages about reading, their reading-related behavior, and their use of reading materials as indicators of "the less easily observed phenomena," their

definitions of reading (Becker, 1970, p. 28). Ethnographic data, then, included what Spradley (1980) called speech messages, cultural behavior, and cultural artifacts. How were these data collected?

Three main methods were used to collect data. According to Wolcott (1976), the use of a variety of modes of gathering information may be seen as "a critical underlying aspect of ethnography" (p. 35). Pelto and Pelto (1978) suggested that a characteristic of ethnographic research is its multi-instrument approach. Furthermore, these authors asserted that "examining cultural behavior with a variety of different approaches greatly enhances the credibility of research results" (p. 121). Denzin (1978) also advocated the use of multiple methods of observation, or triangulation. "Triangulation," he contended, "is a plan of action that will raise sociologists above the personalistic biases that stem from single methodologies. By combining methods . . . observers can partially overcome the deficiencies that flow from one investigator or one method" (p. 294). The three methods of data collection used in the study were participant observation, informant interviewing, and unobtrusive measures. First these methods will be described. Then, problems inherent in the methods and the manner in which the problems were managed will be discussed.

#### Participant observation

According to Schwartz and Jacobs (1979), participant observation is the principal tool of the qualitative, naturalistic method. This field method requires that the researcher

directly [participate] in the sense that he has durable social relations in [the social system under investigation]. He may or may not play an active part in events, or he may interview participants in events which may be considered part of the process of observation. (Zelditch, 1969, p. 9)

Wolcott (1976) pointed out that school settings offer few formal roles for the researcher to assume and hence participate in the social scene, as traditional ethnographers have done. However, the role claimed by the participant observer, or the role which subjects assign him/her, has consequences for what he/she will be able to learn. Wrote Schwartz and Jacobs (1979),

Who you are and where you are within such a world have a role in creating that world and in fashioning the colored glasses through which you see it and it sees you. . . . the initial social role (and/or status) adopted by the participant-observer usually remains fixed throughout his study. It will define for him and others the way in which he is part of the social world which he is studying. (pp. 50, 52)

In this study the researcher was a "known observer" (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979, p. 55). Mrs. Saunders was aware of the researcher's purposes, and the students were told that the researcher wanted to find out what children do in first grade. The researcher's identity was described to the students as "the one who writes and asks questions." It was believed that this role would allow the researcher to "best study those aspects of society in which [she] is interested" (Gold, 1969, p. 38). As Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, Ehrlich, and Sabshin (1969) reported, it was necessary to restate the researcher's identity several times during the study to remind students how to interact with the researcher. When students began to ask the researcher for help on assignments, for example, the researcher or the teacher announced that the



students would have to ask someone else because the researcher was there to write and ask questions.

The type of researcher participation with the people and in the activities observed was characterized as passive (Spradley, 1980). Regarding passive participation Spradley wrote, "The ethnographer engaged in passive participation is present at the scene of action but does not participate or interact with other people to any great extent" (p. 59). During the first month of the project, the researcher rarely interacted with students. Typically she stationed herself on the outskirts of the classroom and recorded observed activities. She avoided eye contact with students and ignored those who attempted to get her attention. However, as the study progressed, the researcher began to ask questions of students to gain greater insight into their behaviors, speech messages, and use of artifacts. During this period of increased interaction the researcher alternated between remaining at a fixed location and moving around the classroom. Throughout the study the researcher interacted with the teacher. Strategies utilized in student and teacher interviewing will be discussed in a subsequent section.

Although the earliest observations were directed toward a general description of the classroom, the majority of observations were oriented toward reading-related activity. There were a number of occasions during the school day when children engaged in reading or talking about reading. For instance, some children chose books as soon as they entered the classroom in the morning. Reading usually took place during the introduction and explanation of morning work. While the children worked on morning assignments, more reading took place. Reading occurred

during reading groups and during free time. There was also reading and reading-related talk during story time in the afternoon. The researcher directed her observations to occasions such as these when children were involved with reading. In addition, the researcher observed during seven of the children's Tuesday afternoon library visits. Observations in the classroom and in the library focused on the activities of the 15 children who were in the top and bottom reading groups.

The researcher observed 150 hours of classroom activity over a four-month period in the fall of 1983. Observations were approximately evenly distributed across all days of the week and times of the day. A total of 48 observations were made on the following days: 10 Mondays, 10 Tuesdays, 10 Wednesdays, 11 Thursdays, 7 Fridays. As the researcher completed an observation, she told the teacher when she would return. This manner of scheduling was requested by the teacher.

### Interviewing

Two types of interviewing were utilized in this study: formal interviewing and informal interviewing (Spradley, 1980). Formal interviews were those which occurred as a result of a request by the researcher. In these cases the researcher had particular questions in mind and asked the informants to schedule a time when they could meet with her. Formal interviews were conducted with the teacher, the teacher in the adjoining classroom, the kindergarten teachers of the studied children, and the children. These interviews took the form of "guided conversations" as described by Lofland (1971). Lofland summarized the nature of guided conversations as follows:

the aim [is] . . . to provide for oneself a list of things to be sure to ask about when talking to the person interviewed. It is because of this aim that this type of device is called an interview guide rather than an interview schedule or questionnaire. One wants the interviewee to speak freely and in his own terms about a set of concerns you bring to the interaction, plus whatever else the interviewee might introduce. (p. 84)

Although core questions provided a framework for formal interviews, the conversational nature of these interviews often led to additional questions and to unanticipated, volunteered information from interviewees. For example, the following core questions were identified to guide interviews with students in the top and bottom reading groups:

1. Do you see people reading now? How do you know they're reading?
2. Who is the best reader in the class? How do you know?
3. What reading do you do when you're at school? At home? Is there someone else at home who reads? Who? What kind of reading does this person do?
4. Are you a good reader? How do you know?
5. Why do people read?

During one interview, a girl volunteered, "My mamma teached me [to read] when I was five years old." This statement prompted the researcher to ask, "Tell me what she taught you." This kind of conversational give-and-take resulting in new questions and unexpected data was typical of interviewing in this study. Core questions for formal interviews with Mrs. Saunders, the teacher in the adjoining room, and the kindergarten teachers are in Appendices B, C, D, E, and F.

Informal interviews occurred on those occasions when the researcher asked questions of the children and teacher during the course of participant observation. The questions were typically suggested by an observed event rather than determined in advance. For example, when

children worked on seatwork assignments, the researcher asked such questions as "What are you doing?" "How are you supposed to do it?" and "Why did the teacher have you do this page?" The majority of informal teacher interviewing took place during periods when the children were not in the room. The researcher often asked the teacher to comment on a child's behavior. For instance, the researcher frequently asked questions such as, "What do you think was going on with Tommy during reading group?" or "Why do you think Susie had so much trouble with the vocabulary worksheet?" So as to avoid disrupting classroom activity, the researcher refrained from questioning the teacher during instructional time unless the teacher initiated the interaction. Often when the teacher initiated an interaction she did so to fill the researcher in on an event the researcher had missed. The teacher was a valuable informant in that she frequently volunteered information about children's activities that the researcher had not been present to observe.

#### Unobtrusive measures

Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest (1966) defined unobtrusive measures as "measures that do not require the cooperation of a [subject] and that do not themselves contaminate the [data]" (p. 2). Denzin (1978) explained that "the use of unobtrusive measures represents an awareness on the part of sociologists that their presence as observers is foreign, and therefore in some sense reactive" (p. 257). In other words, as Schwartz and Jacobs (1979) explained, the investigator's presence and activities affect the social process being studied. Unobtrusive measures

minimize the possibility that the observer's presence "may change the very world being examined" (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979, p. 75). The specific measures used included physical trace analysis and document analysis.

According to Denzin (1978), "physical trace analysis is most appropriately viewed as a strategy for recording the incidence, frequency, and distribution of social acts toward certain social objects through time and in various situations" (p. 260). In this study the researcher noted both the children's and the teacher's use of reading-related materials. She recorded children's choices of trade books during free time and their subsequent use of chosen books. Children's use of assigned materials was also recorded, and completed assignments were often examined when the children left the room. Use of other materials such as word cards and lists, individual 10" x 12" chalkboards, drawing paper, encyclopedias, and library books was also recorded. The teacher's choice and use of instructional materials were noted as were the teacher-student interactions that took place regarding reading-related materials.

The analyzed documents were the children's cumulative school records. Individual folders contained the following information: physician's report; personal history, including developmental milestones, social development, and interests; family data, such as address, phone number, and parents' occupations; scores on the Metropolitan Readiness Test or the Metropolitan Achievement Test, primer level; kindergarten report cards, including the instructional strategy to which the child was assigned on the basis of the state's Primary Education Program; and results of screening for speech and gifted programs. It was felt that these data would be helpful in supplementing the researcher's observations.

Although unobtrusive measures do not present the same problems as participant observation and interviewing, they also do not permit much insight into the perspectives of the people being studied. The researcher's goal was to overcome the shortcomings of participant observation and interviewing by triangulating the three methods. The combining of methods is not only characteristic of ethnographic research but is recommended by many qualitative researchers (Becker & Geer, 1969; Denzin, 1978; McCall & Simmons, 1969; Pelto & Pelto, 1978; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979; Webb et al., 1966). What are the problems with participant observation and interviewing, and how were these problems managed? These questions are addressed below.

There are problems inherent in participant observation which must be addressed if the researcher is to have confidence in the quality of the data collected. McCall and Simmons (1969) summarized three categories of threats to data collection as follows: "1) reactive effects of the observer's presence or activities on the phenomena being observed; 2) distorting effects of selective perception and interpretation on the observer's part; and 3) limitations on the observer's ability to witness all relevant aspects of the phenomena in question" (p. 78). These problems may distort collected data such that the researcher's written records do not represent the naturally occurring events of the classroom. In this study procedures were incorporated to minimize the potentially damaging effects of the problems of participant observation.

The first problem, observer effects on the behavior of teacher and children, confounds almost all research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The

researcher took several steps to minimize the problem. First, one of the criteria used in selecting a classroom to be studied was that the teacher be accustomed to having observers in the room. Not only was the studied teacher comfortable with other adults in her room, but the children were constantly exposed to other adults including university students, volunteering parents, an aide, and observers from other schools. The researcher's presence, then, was not unusual or intimidating to either teacher or children. Another feature of the study which helped the researcher determine the effects of her presence on classroom activity was the length of time she spent in the classroom. Observations began on August 17th during preplanning week and continued through December 16th. This lengthy observation period enabled the researcher to become a taken-for-granted part of the classroom. By remaining on the outskirts of classroom activity and avoiding eye contact with children during the first weeks of the study, the researcher quickly blended into the background. In addition, by reminding children of the researcher's role--the one who writes and asks questions--the teacher and the researcher made it clear to the children that the researcher was not another teacher. One indication of the children's lack of attention to her was their tendency to misbehave in her presence. For example, the researcher sat in on a reading group conducted by a student teacher, Ms. Clark. The following excerpt demonstrates that the students were not inhibited by the researcher, nor did they perceive her as an authority figure in the classroom. Had Mrs. Saunders been observing the lesson, the students would not have misbehaved as they did:

Ms. Clark: Okay, so you're going to read the words and the sentences and put the words in the right sentence. Can anyone do the first one?

Ellen: Can I get something to drink, Ms. Clark, please?

Ms. Clark: When we're finished.

Ellen: No, now. I'm thirsty.

Ms. Clark asks someone to do the next one.

Ms. Clark reads the sentence: "The food \_\_\_\_ good." So what is it?

Robin: Smells.

Ms. Clark, to Ellen, who leans back in the chair and looks around the room: Ellen, what will you write in number two?

Robin: Stupid. We write "stupid page."

Ms. Clark: Ellen, the longer you take, the longer it's going to be before you can go to the bathroom.

Ellen: It's a drink I want!

Ms. Clark: Well, same thing.

Ellen: I have to go blow my nose. (she stands)

Ms. Clark: Ellen, here's a kleenex, right here. (Ellen, Robin, and Tracey all take kleenex and start blowing their noses.)

Another advantage of the length of time spent observing in the classroom was that the researcher could use her knowledge of the setting and of children's typical behavior patterns to judge the naturalness of observed events. Although the great majority of children's behavior seemed to be unaffected by the researcher's presence, some episodes reflected observer effects. For instance, children occasionally "showed off" for the researcher, as the following brief excerpt illustrates:

I sit by the book table. Mike walks to the booktable and begins picking up books. As he picks one up he says: See this one? This an easy one. I can read this one. As he continues, books slide off the table onto the floor. After repeating this for about 15 books, he leaves the table. He walks across two of the books he has dropped and makes no attempt to pick any of them up.

Another check on observer effects was made by interviewing the teacher who shared the room with Mrs. Saunders. Not only was this teacher a close friend of Mrs. Saunders, but she was frequently in and out of Mrs. Saunders' side of the room. The researcher asked the teacher



what kind of influence she thought the researcher's presence and activities were having on Mrs. Saunders' behavior. The teacher's comments follow:

I really don't think you have much influence on her. You're really quiet when you're in there, and you've sort of made it clear to the children because of your posture and your behavior that you're not one of the helping teachers. The only thing that I've noticed is that her hostess behavior is up a little bit. . . . I mean that I think she is poised for company and for adult questioning more than she usually is. But as far as her behavior with the kids, I can't tell when you're in there and when you're not. Her teaching style and her conversational tone with the kids don't change. I have to go and look to see if you're there. . . . I don't feel like she's conscious of anything except your wish to see the real situation.

Yet another procedure utilized to check on observer effects was to compare children's and teacher's behavior in different situations.

Wilson (1977) suggested that the researcher compare the following:

a) what a subject says in response to a question; b) what he says to other people; c) what he says in various situations; d) what he says at various times; e) what he actually does; f) various nonverbal signals about the matter (for example, body postures); and g) what those who are significant to the person feel, say, and do about the matter.  
(pp. 256-257)

By comparing speech messages, behavior, and use of materials, the researcher could ascertain the degree to which observed events were unaffected or natural. In addition to using her own fieldnotes to compare behaviors, the researcher had access to fieldnotes recorded by an investigator who had conducted a study in Mrs. Saunders' room during the previous school year. Teacher-oriented observational and interview data from the second study were strikingly similar to the data collected on the teacher in the present study.

To summarize, the researcher took several steps to minimize and to determine observer effects on studied behavior. A classroom was

selected in which observers were commonplace; the researcher spent 150 hours in the classroom; the researcher clearly established her role with the teacher and children; the researcher compared data from various sources; and the researcher interviewed another teacher to get her perceptions of the researcher's impact on classroom life. The second problem area concerned the effects of observer bias on data collection.

As Wilson (1977) pointed out, "No one, of course, enters a situation a true tabula rasa . . . previous experiences influence the scientist's observation and thought" (p. 251). Observed phenomena are "selected and filtered as well as interpreted and evaluated" (Schwartz & Schwartz, 1969, p. 90) by the investigator who enters the research site with opinions, prejudices, and assumptions. Steps must be taken to determine the effect of observer subjectivity on recorded data.

Two features of the study which helped the researcher transcend bias were the study's length and the nature of data collection. As Bogdan and Biklen (1982) pointed out, "The researcher spends a considerable amount of time in the empirical world laboriously collecting and reviewing piles of data. . . . The data that are collected provide a much more detailed rendering of events than even the most creatively prejudiced mind might have imagined prior to the study" (p. 42). In addition to striving to record detailed, concrete, verbatim accounts of observed behavior over a long period of time, the researcher included subjective remarks and reflections in brackets. These subjective comments served to remind the researcher of her prejudices and their possible impact on the data collected. The process of confronting personal biases is the main method of limiting their distorting effects.

Schwartz and Schwartz (1969) summarized the assumptions and conditions of the active monitoring of researcher bias:

Implicit here is the assumption that bias is a universal phenomenon; that the observer can and does know what his biases are; and that, knowing what they are, he can, by specifying them prevent distortions of his observations. There are at least three conditions that need to be fulfilled before this suggestion can be put into effect. The observer must 1) be motivated to look for his biases; 2) look for them actively and, having come upon a bias, explore its meaning and ramifications; and 3) look upon the uncovering of his biases as a continuous process of discovery--as an ongoing process to which there is no end. (p. 103)

The researcher's biases grew out of her experiences as a public school student, a teacher, and as an advanced graduate student specializing in reading and working with preservice teachers. As these experiences are related to the researcher's preparation for conducting the study, they will be discussed in the section on researcher qualifications and biases.

The final problem inherent in participant observation, the researcher's inability to observe and record all events related to children's definitions of reading, was addressed in three ways. First, by spending 150 hours observing in the classroom, the researcher was confident that she had captured a thorough description of relevant aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. Second, the teacher served as a valuable informant, filling the researcher in on events she had not directly observed. Third, the researcher's use of interviewing and unobtrusive measures filled in gaps in observational data. For instance, kindergarten teachers provided data which the researcher could not have observed, and the children described some of their own experiences and thoughts which otherwise would have been inaccessible

to the researcher. Regarding the use of participant observation and interviewing, Becker and Geer (1969) noted, "There is considerable value in using the strong points of one method to illuminate the shortcomings of another" (p. 331). What are the shortcomings of interviewing?

McCall and Simmons (1969) summarized three primary threats to the interpretability of interview data as follows: "1) the reactive effects of the interview situation upon the received testimony; 2) distortions in testimony; and 3) repertorial inabilities of the interviewee" (p. 104). The main method of assessing the extent of these problems was by supplementing interview data with observational data. According to Dean and Whyte (1969), "the researcher is constantly relating the sentiments expressed to the behavior he observes--or would expect to observe--in the situation under discussion" (p. 109). The young children in particular had difficulties expressing themselves, especially in response to abstract questions such as, "What is reading?" The researcher evaluated a child's responses by considering them in light of what she already knew about the child, by comparing them to responses of other children, and by comparing them with the child's speech messages and behaviors in other situations (Dean & Whyte, 1969). The two sources of data provided a means whereby the researcher could evaluate the quality of data collected by either method.

#### Making an Ethnographic Record

The data collected through observations, interviews, and unobtrusive measures were in the form of reading-related behavior, speech messages, and use of materials. The major portion of the data were recorded

in written form. Written records included fieldnotes, transcribed interviews, and a research journal.

During observations the researcher took fieldnotes. The researcher's goal was to record observed activity in as much detail as possible. She attempted to record children's and teacher's language verbatim and their actions in specific, concrete terms. These fieldnotes represented what Spradley (1980) called a "condensed account" (p. 69) of what actually occurred. That is, due to the speed and complexity of classroom activity, the researcher typically recorded phrases and unconnected sentences which would help her recall the details of observed events. Following observation periods, such as when children went to a special class, the researcher filled in details to create an "expanded account" (p. 70). Still striving to use concrete descriptions and verbatim language, the researcher indicated in the fieldnotes when she was directly quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing. Once the expanded account was completed, the fieldnotes were typed into a formal protocol. Although the majority of the fieldnotes represented classroom activity, a portion of each fieldnote record contained the researcher's reactions to and impressions of observed events. In recording these subjective comments the researcher used brackets to separate them from the record of classroom activity. Also in the fieldnote record the researcher sometimes included questions she wanted to ask the teacher or the children. These questions, like other subjective remarks, were bracketed.

Other data recorded in fieldnotes were descriptions of children's completed assignments. The researcher often reproduced portions of ditto sheets and workbook pages in the fieldnotes, particularly when children

were having difficulty with a task. Other diagrams recorded in fieldnotes were classroom maps, chalkboard work, and examples of children's writing, such as love notes and Christmas cards.

Formal interviews with the teacher, the children, and the teacher in the other half of the room were tape recorded. All recorded interviews were then transcribed and filed separately from fieldnote records.

Another written record was the research journal. "Like a diary," wrote Spradley (1980), "this journal will contain a record of experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise during fieldwork" (p. 71). In the journal the researcher kept a record of the process of gaining entry to the classroom, dating and describing each experience with the teacher, the principal, and the required paperwork. Also in the journal were the researcher's musings about her research goals and methods. Outlines for meetings with the researcher's advisor were written in the journal as were the advisor's comments. The researcher's reactions to observed events were recorded in the fieldnotes rather than the journal in order to keep observations and interpretations together. As the study progressed the researcher recorded more subjective comments in the fieldnotes than in the journal. It was found that recording these kinds of comments in the fieldnotes was more convenient than switching to the journal.

Fieldnotes, transcribed interviews, and the research journal were the written records of data collected in this study. As such they provided the substance for data analysis which was an ongoing process comprised of several phases.

### Analyzing Ethnographic Data

Just as the methodology was designed to be compatible with the social-interaction perspective and suitable for the investigation of children's definitions of reading, the choice of analytic strategies was influenced by "the general purpose of the research, the nature of the research problem or question, and the theoretical perspectives that inform the research problem and intrigue the researcher" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981, p. 64). Goetz and LeCompte further noted that "the nature of the problem or the way in which the research goal is defined is, of course, the most significant of all design constraints" (p. 64). In this study the researcher's goal was to discover definitions of reading constructed by children in one classroom. To achieve this goal, many hours of direct observation and interviewing took place. The researcher's task in analyzing these data has been described as analogous to "putting a jigsaw puzzle together" (Smith & Geoffrey, 1968, p. 15). The researcher conducted a systematic search for order and understanding by "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 145). Spradley's (1980) model of data analysis was used to guide the search for patterns in the hundreds of pages of data collected in this study.

The process of data analysis was ongoing and consisted of four phases. Each phase related to a type of question the researcher posed and a type of observation she conducted. The types of questions and

observations, which are the basic unit of ethnographic inquiry, have been discussed in a previous section. A cycle of questioning, collecting, and analyzing was repeated throughout the study. The phases of data analysis are described below:

1. Domain analysis was the first phase of the search for patterns. During this phase the researcher identified categories of meaning, or what Spradley (1980) called cultural domains. These categories were discovered by reading the protocols with specific questions in mind. Spradley identified nine types of questions which are useful in classifying seemingly unique objects and events into categories. These questions include Are there kinds of things here? Are there places here? Are there parts of things here? Are there results of things here? Are there reasons for things? Are there uses for things? Are there ways to do things? Are there stages in things? Are there characteristics of things? These questions suggested categories but were not meant to restrict the researcher's identification of categories. Examples of some of the earliest domains were Kinds of Teacher Questions and Places in Which Children Read. The search for domains continued throughout the study. The researcher formulated structural questions based on identified domains and made focused observations in order to answer the questions. For example, related to the domain Kinds of Teacher Questions the researcher asked, "What are all the kinds of questions the teacher asks?" Observations focused on finding as many answers to the question as the researcher could identify.

2. Taxonomic analysis was the second phase of data analysis. During this phase the researcher analyzed domains to find out how they



were organized. A taxonomy reveals the organization of domains by showing the relationships among the terms inside the domain. Taxonomic analysis also helps the researcher to relate domains to one another. For example, the domain Kinds of Questions was a very large domain which included teacher questions and student questions. Within each of the two levels of student and teacher questions were still more levels. Within the domain of student questions, for instance, were student-student questions and student-teacher questions. Within these levels were more levels, such as technical assistance questions ("How do you spell 'who'?"), directions questions ("What do you do on this page?"), and socializing questions ("Wanna play school?"). In developing taxonomies the researcher attempted to fit together the pieces of the scene (domains) already identified. Associated with taxonomic analysis were contrast questions which led to selected observations.

3. Componential analysis is a search for the characteristics of identified domains and of the terms within domains. If an object or event has meaning in the setting, it has certain attributes regularly associated with it. For instance, if directions questions were a type of student-student question in the classroom, there were certain characteristics which defined this kind of question. The goal of componential analysis was to determine whether identified domains and terms within domains were distinct elements in the setting under investigation.

4. Theme analysis involved the search for a theme which tied together the identified parts of the scene. During this phase the researcher looked for meanings which recurred across domains. Although a theme may not have applied to all parts of the scene, it had to have

a high degree of generality and serve to link at least several domains.

The analytic strategies utilized in this study constituted a systematic, rigorous organizational process. Data were analyzed to identify categories of objects and events related to children's definitions of reading. Further analysis revealed relationships among identified categories and the relationship of the parts to the whole classroom scene. Throughout all phases of data analysis, questions emerged which served to direct the researcher's observations of the scene. The interactive nature of data collection and analysis is a fundamental principle of the research model utilized in this study. In the final two sections of this chapter these two topics related to data collection and analysis will be discussed: (a) researcher qualifications and biases and (b) validity of the researcher's findings.

#### Researcher Qualifications and Biases

Since the qualitative researcher is the key research instrument, qualifications and biases which may influence data collection are important to consider. Wolcott (1976) identified several criteria for judging the adequacy of an ethnographer. Because the research approach utilized in this study "borrows generously from ethnographic techniques" (Wolcott, 1976, p. 30) and was utilized to identify participant perspectives, as would an ethnographer, Wolcott's list of qualifications were considered to be relevant. According to Wolcott, the researcher must be a "sensitive and perceptive observer, at once sympathetic,

skeptical, objective, and inordinately curious." Furthermore, the researcher requires "physical stamina, emotional stability, and personal flexibility" as well as "the skills of the story-teller and writer" (p. 28). The most important qualification is experience conducting fieldwork. Although cross-cultural fieldwork is considered by many to be a mandatory experience for an ethnographer, Wolcott suggested that one could substitute experience doing microethnography in "educationally-relevant events and settings" (p. 29) for cross-cultural research. Although the researcher's flexibility and writing skill will have to be judged by the reader, the following experiences related to Wolcott's criteria are listed below:

1. The researcher was a classroom teacher for four years, two years at the secondary level and two years at the elementary level. At the secondary level the researcher taught reading and language arts.

2. The researcher earned an M.Ed. in the area of reading.

3. The researcher has completed coursework for a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction, including courses in elementary curriculum and curriculum development. Specializing in reading, the researcher completed extensive coursework in this area.

4. The researcher has taken two courses which provided a theoretical and practical background in qualitative research. In addition to the readings required by these courses, the researcher has read extensively in the area of qualitative research foundations and methods as indicated by entries in the reference list of this report.

5. The researcher has completed two qualitative studies in elementary school classrooms. A report of each study was written, and one was presented at a national conference.

6. The researcher has gained additional experience as an elementary classroom observer by supervising student teachers over a two-year period.

7. The researcher has worked to develop her writing skills by preparing manuscripts for publication and for presentation at state, regional, and national conferences.

In addition to meeting certain criteria for conducting qualitative research Wolcott suggested that the fieldworker "needs to grapple with his own 'underlying assumptions' and . . . recognize the kinds of evidence he is most attracted to in building his account" (p. 27). Schwartz and Jacobs (1979) referred to this process as "true confessions" (p. 58). In recognition of the potential impact of the researcher's values and biases on the nature of the data collected and on project outcomes, the following list of relevant beliefs is provided. By listing these beliefs the researcher demonstrates awareness of them and provides the reader with a basis for evaluation of the study (Ross, 1978).

1. The researcher objects to the widespread practice of teaching reading as a sequence of subskills isolated from the purposeful reading of various types of text. Related to this is the researcher's concern over the domination of reading instruction by the teacher's manuals of the basal series. Although the researcher believes that there is nothing inherently wrong with basal readers, she would prefer to see instruction reflect closer attention to children's language and experiences.

2. The researcher is particularly concerned about the kinds of reading instruction provided to low-achieving children. Typically these

children receive repeated drill on isolated reading subskills. It is believed that often this instruction does not serve them well.

3. The researcher believes that classrooms are complex, dynamic, multi-dimensional environments in which children and teachers influence and shape one another's behaviors.

4. The researcher assumes that children's perceptions of reading are influenced by numerous factors, and their perceptions may not always be congruent with the teacher's perceptions.

### Validity

In qualitative research validity is a central concern (Erickson, 1979; Hymes, 1982; Rist, 1977). According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982), "Establishing validity requires determining the extent to which conclusions effectively represent empirical reality and assessing whether constructs devised by researchers represent or measure the categories of human experience that occur" (p. 32). That is, the researcher strives to "improve the fit between the model and the reality" (Lancy, 1978, p. 125). Some of the steps taken to ensure the validity of the study's findings have already been discussed. For instance, the long period of data collection enabled the researcher to become familiar with the scene and its participants. Also, the use of several methods of data collection provided opportunities to compare data and to probe deeply into participants' perspectives. Another procedure the researcher utilized to contribute to the validity of the findings was to search for negative examples of hypothesized components of the model of

children's perceptions of reading. Becker (1970) summarized this process:

After constructing a model specifying the relationships among various elements of this part of the organization, the observer seeks greater accuracy by successively refining the model to take account of evidence which does not fit his previous formulation; by searching for negative cases (items of evidence which run counter to the relationships hypothesized in the model) which might force such revision; and by searching intensively for the interconnections in vivo of the various elements he has conceptualized from his data. (p. 34)

Yet another procedure for establishing the validity of the researcher's findings was to discuss them with some of the classroom participants. By sharing findings with the teacher, the researcher received valuable feedback on her interpretations of participants' perspectives.

In the next two chapters the researcher's findings are described and discussed. Descriptions of the children's definitions of reading and evidence to support the existence of these definitions are presented in the first of the two findings chapters. In the second chapter children's definitions are explained in terms of a factor which emerged as a powerful force in definition construction, the teacher's classroom practice.

### CHAPTER III CHILDREN'S DEFINITIONS OF READING

The goal of this study was to uncover the definitions of reading constructed by first-grade children in the low and high reading groups in one classroom. As previously discussed, the researcher adopted a social-interaction perspective wherein it was assumed that individuals construct definitions of reading through their interactions in social contexts. In this study the researcher focused on interactions which took place within one classroom throughout the school day. More specifically, observations were focused on children's speech messages about reading, their reading-related behavior, and their use of reading materials. These kinds of concrete phenomena served as indicators of children's definitions of reading.

The collected data were analyzed into domains or categories according to similarities among recorded events. Domains which proved to be particularly helpful in revealing reading definitions included Kinds of Reading Miscues, Kinds of Things Children Do with Chosen Books, Kinds of Statements Children Make About Books and Assignments, Kinds of Statements the Teacher Makes About Children's Reading, and Kinds of Statements Kindergarten Teachers Make About Children's Reading. Taxonomies were constructed by integrating data from different domains. That is, data which indicated a particular definition of reading were drawn from

across domains and organized into new domains which represented definitions of reading. Taxonomies were also constructed to represent the reading-related behavior of individual children. The purpose of this analytic exercise was to verify the existence of identified definitions through careful examination of the behavior of each child who seemed to use a particular definition. As children's definitions are described, data from the taxonomies will be provided to support and illustrate the definitions. It should be noted that illustrations included were selected from among many examples and do not represent the sole indicators of a particular definition.

Among the studied children in this classroom, those in the highest and lowest reading groups, there were six definitions of reading (see Table 1). No single definition was shared by all children. Some definitions were peculiar to one group while other definitions were shared by members of both groups. Most children constructed and utilized more than one definition of reading.

The first three definitions of reading--reading is saying words correctly, reading is schoolwork, reading is a source of status--were common among low group children. The schoolwork and status definitions were also utilized by two girls in the high group. What did these three definitions have in common? Readers utilizing these definitions seemed to view reading as an externally imposed task. While this does not mean that the readers did not experience some pleasure associated with reading, the pleasure was related to pronouncing the words correctly (reading is saying words), getting the job done (reading is schoolwork), or gaining recognition (reading is a source of status). Children



Table 1  
Low and High Group Children's Definitions of Reading

	Reading is saying words correctly	Reading is schoolwork	Reading is a source of status	Reading is a way to learn things	Reading is a private pleasure	Reading is a social activity
<u>Low</u>						
Jason	X	X				
Joseph	X	X	X			
Lizzie	X		X			
Melissa	X	X				
Mike	X		X			
Richard	X	X	X			
Sharon	X					
Susie	X					X
Tommy	X	X				
<u>High</u>						
Ellen				X	X	X
Jane				X	X	X
Meg					X	
Robin				X	X	X
Sally		X	X			X
Tracey		X	X			X

utilizing these three definitions were not likely to engage in private experiences with books or to choose to spend time with books under free-choice conditions. These definitions were associated with the view of reading as a required task.

The next three definitions--reading is a way to learn things, reading is a private pleasure, reading is a social activity--were utilized almost exclusively by the high group girls. Unlike the first three definitions, these reflected a view of reading as a personally meaningful activity. Children utilizing these definitions sought out books during free-choice periods and were, in general, busier with books than children utilizing the first three definitions.

#### Reading Is Saying Words Correctly

Perhaps the clearest definition of reading to identify in this classroom was that reading is seeing and saying words. This definition was constructed and utilized by all children in the lowest reading group. Not only did the definition serve to guide their reading behavior during reading group time, but it influenced the nature of their reading in other classroom contexts. Although high group children referred to the importance of learning words, there was a clear distinction between the two groups' words-based definition of reading. While high group children viewed knowing words as part of a larger process, the low group children viewed saying the words correctly as an end in itself. For these children reading was an oral performance involving calling out words. Often the meaning of a word or the sense

of a series of words was ignored. Saying the words was more important to low group children than finding meaning in written language.

During reading group sessions, the majority of low group children's talk was in the form of answers to the teacher's questions. However, children's spontaneous questions and comments frequently focused on saying words. A standard part of the reading lesson involved reading cards on which the teacher had printed words from the pre-primer. Much of the children's talk about reading was related to words on cards. For instance, children often asked if they could say the words. Such statements were of the form, "We gonna do our words?" or "I wish we could say the words. I wish we could say the words every day." The children also asked the teacher if they could get new words and asked one another if they had a particular word, as in the following example:

Lizzie says to each child in the group: Don't you got "no" (She holds up a card with "no" printed on it.)

Sharon: Everybody got "no"!

Lizzie: Let me see something 'cause I might have two "nots."

Sharon: Teacher, I don't have "not." (She repeats this.)

Teacher to Lizzie: I think you're the only one who has it.

Teacher asks group: How do you spell "not"?

Lizzie's attention to words even extended to the researcher's activities. During reading group she observed the researcher writing and remarked to the other children, "She's doing our words. She's writing our words down."

Low group children also talked about the words they had at home. Their comments included, "I got these at home," "My mamma gets lots of words," "My mamma showed me words on cards like this, and I read them."

The children also talked about how many cards they had, with such comments as, "I got a lot of words! My pin (paper clip) can't fit on!"

These children exhibited other behaviors during their reading group time which indicated their concern for saying words and for saying them correctly. For example, they asked questions about words, such as, "Ain't this 'hide'?" and "What is this word?" In addition, some of the children were quick to criticize those who said words incorrectly, as the following fieldnote excerpt illustrates:

The group reads a sentence in unison: This is the park.

(Some voices say "the" instead of "this.")

Lizzie: Teacher, they don't do it right!

Sharon: Uh-huh! This is the park!

Lizzie: Not the first time they didn't!

Teacher: We're all learning to read here Lizzie, and people do it at different times.

Yet another example of the children's words-based definition occurred when the teacher announced that the group would skip a page in their workbook:

Teacher: I'm going to skip 20. You already know "I am." We can skip this. Turn to 21 and fold it over.

Sharon: Why not this page? (She looks at a page with an airplane on it and no print.) Oh, it ain't got no words on it.

The children also indicated their "saying words" definition of reading by calling out words before the teacher arrived at the reading group table. One child would pick up the pile of cards and show a card to each child at the table. The group cooperated as the student held up a card and asked, "What's this say?" When a child hesitated on a word, others eagerly called it out.

The low group children's behavior outside of the reading group provided further evidence that they defined reading as saying words

correctly. These children neither chose books as often nor spent as much time with books as did the children in the high group. This was not surprising given their definition of reading. Since they defined reading as saying the words correctly, and since they could not say many of the words they encountered, they did not view reading books as an attractive free-time activity. While the children chose books less often than the high group children, their interactions with print and their comments about reading indicated a words-based definition.

Several of the children read individual words aloud at their desks much as they read word cards during reading group. In the following fieldnote excerpt, one child read her cards and then showed them to the child next to her:

During sharing time, Lizzie returns to the room from her remedial tutoring session. She sits down and looks at each of her three word cards. She whispers the three words: "here," "yes," "not." Then she turns to Melissa and shows the cards one at a time. Melissa stares blankly.

In a similar incident, Lizzie and Sharon read a list of rhyming words on a commercially produced chart:

Lizzie: Sharon, we're gonna say some of these, okay?  
(She points to each word and pronounces it as Sharon watches.)

Lizzie's interactions with books were guided by her words-based definition of reading. For instance, she was observed reciting words from the pre-primer while turning the pages of trade books from the book table. She clearly enunciated words she knew, despite the fact that these words were not to be found in the trade books. In the following fieldnote excerpts Lizzie demonstrates her definition of reading as an oral performance:

Lizzie holds a book. She opens it and says to the researcher: This is a working book. A Big Bird working book. See, you read and then circle. She points to words in the book while saying: Bill-is-not-here. (These words are not in this book.)

In a similar incident, Lizzie called out a number of words from the primer:

On Mike's desk there are word cards which belong to a rhyming game. Lizzie walks over, touches "run" and says: Run. Run, run, said Lad. Run, run, said Jill. Run, run, said Ben. Run, run, said Bill.

Other children in the low group utilized a words-based definition of reading. Mike, for instance, would only read out loud, standing by an adult. The teacher commented, "I think Mike thinks he isn't reading unless he's saying the words aloud to someone." As he read orally, Mike concentrated on saying words rather than making sense of the words he was saying. On one occasion, he stood next to the researcher and read from the book, Let's Go, Dear Dragon. He misread a number of words and never corrected himself:

Mike: Get want. Get want. (Get out. Get out.) No one can gets (guess) where you are. That it not go. (That is not good.)

Jason's words-based definition of reading and his confusion about written language were reflected in his experience writing and reading a Christmas card. In this incident the researcher may have (unintentionally) indicated to Jason that there was a problem with his card:

Jason to researcher: I'll read you my story. Merry Christmas Mom Dad I love are I can buy my. (Jason looks up at the researcher.)

Researcher: What do you want to say?

Jason: I don't know.

Researcher: You were probably thinking of something you wanted to say to your Mom and Dad.

Jason: I don't know. I'll erase from here. (He erases "are," "but," and "my.")

Researcher: What do you want to say to your Mom and Dad?

Jason: I could say Happy Christmas. How do you spell Happy? (He writes the word "Happy" in front of the word "Merry," closes the card, and draws a Christmas tree on the back.)

After having copied "Merry Christmas Mom (and) Dad" from the blackboard, Jason wrote and then read a series of words which did not make sense. When the researcher asked, "What do you want to say?" Jason seemed to realize that something was wrong, but he did not know how to correct his error. Another incident involving Jason further demonstrated his definition of reading:

Jason to researcher: I only have two smilies left. This and this. (He taps his reading workbook and his math book.) As it is Friday, the day students read a book for a smilie, the researcher asks: What book will you read today?

Jason: Uh, prob'ly this one. (He touches a coloring book which supplements the pre-primer.) Maybe this. (He reaches for a trade book which also goes with the pre-primer.) This is the new one.

Researcher: When you get ready to read it, will you get me so I can hear you?

Jason: Well, I can't even read it.

Researcher: You can't?

Jason: No, you have to teach me. Read it to me, then I can read it back to you.

Jason seemed to be equating reading with saying the words correctly--something he could only do by repeating the words after an adult had read them.

During whole-class phonics activities the children often demonstrated their words-based definition of reading. When working in the phonics books, the teacher focused attention on sounds of letters and correct word-calling. Sharon's behavior reflected this child's definition of reading:

The teacher calls on Sharon, who has been wildly waving her arm to be allowed to read a sentence. Robin, who sits next to Sharon, prompts her on each word. Robin whispers the word, Sharon calls it out, loudly, and looks triumphantly at the teacher after each word. After this sentence, Sharon points to the next sentence and quietly says: Jan will fish the pan said the \_\_\_\_\_. The sentence says: Jan will fix the rip in the \_\_\_\_\_. She waits for Robin to fill in the blank, and then copies the word.

Sharon's concern for saying the words correctly was shared by Jason.

Jason, who frequently complained, "I can't read this thing!" became excited when he recognized his name in the phonics book. He called out, "Jason! Mrs. Saunders! That's Jason! My name!" The teacher responded, "Yes, it is. Jason's going to read it because it begins with his name." Immediately Jason claimed, "I can't!" and then again pointed out his name, the one word he could read in the sentence: "Mrs. Saunders, see? Jason, Jason!"

The children's responses to interview questions designed to uncover their definitions of reading indicated that they defined reading as saying words correctly. For example, when asked, "What kinds of reading do you do?" several children responded by reciting words from the pre-primer:

Researcher: Tell me something that you read.

Sharon: All right. I can read, "Jill and Nan hide at the park . . ." and I can read a book that says, "Ben and Ted will run to the park."

When asked other questions about her reading, Sharon responded by reciting story lines in a slow, halting voice as a beginning decoder might. After she announced that her mother had taught her to read, the following exchange took place:

Researcher: How did your mamma teach you to read? What did she do?

Sharon: She told me to read, to say, "Boy meet girl," and I say, "Boy meet girl," and then she told me to say the rest of it. . . .



Sharon's remarks provided further evidence of her view of reading as saying the words.

The children's descriptions of the best readers in the class also reflected their prevailing definition of reading. Children said they knew who the best readers were because they saw and/or heard them read. Good readers were people who "do the sounds" or "sound out the hard words." When asked, "What do I have to be doing when I'm reading?" Richard responded, "You gotta be talking."

Finally, children made numerous remarks during the day which provided evidence for the existence of a words-based definition of reading. For instance, their comments about assignments were sometimes revealing:

Researcher asks Richard: Tell me, Richard, why does Mrs. Saunders make you do this page?

Lizzie overhears and answers: Cuz we learn.

Researcher: What do you learn?

Lizzie: To read--see (she points), this says "big" and this says "little."

Richard points to "yes": And this.

Several days later Richard looked at the researcher's fieldnotes, pointed to the words "go," "I," "Jason," "Lad," and "is" and read each as he pointed. He then said, "You have Jason a lot. And there's Mike. I know a lot of words you know." The researcher asked, "What do you know?" Richard replied, "Duck, cat, get, not, Ted, Ben, Bill, yes, run, duck--did I already say that?" Richard again demonstrated his words-based definition when he tried to read the first words in a trade book--the small print which presented copyright information. After staring at the print for several seconds, he took the book to Mike and pointed to the words, saying, "What does this say?" Mike replied, "You don't gotta read that part."

Children's remarks about other children's behavior also revealed their definitions of reading, as illustrated in the following incident:

Jason is kneeling at the book table with The Golden Goose open in front of him. He reads: You-do-you-do-not--  
Bonnie interrupts: You don't know how to read! (She looks at the page and reads aloud.) You do not like--  
(Jason closes the book and holds it close to his face.)  
Lizzie to Jason: You can't read those words.

The low group children's reading-related behavior was guided by a word-based definition of reading. In this classroom the children demonstrated an acute awareness of words and a great concern for saying them correctly. Their definition was reflected in their behavior throughout the school day, and may have restricted these children in the other definitions they could construct. That is, if a child defined reading as saying words correctly, and if he/she was not able to read many words, the child was not likely to construct a definition of reading as, for instance, a private pleasure, as did most of the high group children. In this classroom, low group children did not construct such definitions.

The high group children were clearly aware of words, but their reading-related behavior was guided by other definitions of reading. In response to interview questions, the high group children pointed out the importance of sounding out words and practicing words in order to be a good reader. For example, when asked, "What do people have to do to be good readers?" Robin replied, "Well, they can practice and study their words a lot." To the same question Jane replied, "They have to sound out the words and get their parents to help them read the words." However, high group children also talked about a variety of purposes and

reasons for reading. Knowing words seemed to be part of the machinery of reading for fun, reading for one's job, reading to learn, and reading to identify things in the environment. While the words-based definition helped explain much of the low group's reading behavior, it did not have the same explanatory power for the behavior of the high group children.

### Reading Is Schoolwork

Most of the low group children and two of the high group children defined reading as schoolwork. This definition was associated with reading-related comments and behaviors which seemed to announce, "We do it because we're supposed to, but we'd rather be having fun." For these children, reading was work, just as math and handwriting were work. Reading was just another "smilie" to be completed in order to move on to free-choice activities.

An early indication of the work definition was that many children did not choose books during free-choice periods. Although these children sometimes chose books when given the choice between a book or drawing paper, they did not select books when given a wider choice of activities. Further, when some children discovered that instead of choosing a book during attendance and lunch count, they could begin their morning smilies, they abandoned books altogether. Jason and Tommy exemplified this behavior. The two boys began their morning work as soon as they could in order to finish it as early as possible. Tommy stood at his desk as he did his smilies. It seemed that he thought standing up gave him quicker access to assistance and hence completion of his assignments.

Frequently he asked whoever was closest to him at the moment, "What's this word?" and "How do you do this?" Often Tommy exclaimed, "Finished!" as he closed his folder, slapped his pencil down on the desk, and quickly moved on to play games on the floor.

Jason's behavior was similar to Tommy's, but Jason was more vocal about his feelings toward work. He excitedly spread the news to his classmates when he found that there would be no smilies one morning. On another occasion, when the researcher asked why the teacher had given him a reading worksheet, he replied, "To do our work." On another occasion he spoke of several subject areas as if they all amounted to the same thing--work. His comments were prompted by the researcher asking him what kinds of reading he did in school. He answered by listing the smilies he typically did, including math. To Jason school subjects seemed to be interchangeable. As with Tommy, Jason preferred to be on the floor with games and puzzles rather than at his desk "working." According to the two boys' kindergarten teachers, they behaved similarly during the previous school year. Neither would choose books during free time; both enjoyed playing with toys and games. For these boys, school seemed to be defined in terms of work and play. Reading was clearly perceived within the work component of classroom life.

Other evidence to support the existence of a "reading is work" definition came from interviews with the children. All of the low group children talked about reading as something people have to learn how to do. When asked, "Why do people read?" they gave the following kinds of responses:

'Cause they want to learn how to read.  
So when you grow up you can know how to read.  
'Cause they don't know what things say and they can learn  
how to read.

The low group children reported that people read to learn how to read. In other words, reading is work one does when one is young in order to be able to do something (read) when one is older. Some children used the word "work" when talking about reading. For instance, when the researcher asked Joseph, "Why isn't anybody reading now?" he answered, "'Cause they finished their work." Tommy said several times that the way to become a better reader was to work. Having discovered that many children defined reading as work shed light on the behavior of low group children. The definition also helped to explain why the children did not favor books during free-choice periods.

Low group children were not alone in defining reading as schoolwork. Two of the high group children also utilized this definition. Tracey and Sally stood out among high group children in their apparent lack of interest in books. Once it became clear that the schoolwork definition explained some of the other children's behavior, the researcher considered the possibility that it might apply to Tracey and Sally. Indeed, this definition was clearly one of several constructed by the two girls. As with the low group children, these girls did not often choose books during free-choice times. During periods when children were expected to read, the girls would busy themselves with books. For instance, they would go to the book table, select several books, and return to their seats. On one occasion Tracey put the books inside her desk and turned to the boy next to her to say, "Go get your folder."

The next morning she returned the books to the book table. Sally engaged in a similar activity of carrying four books to her desk and then quietly reciting, "Eeny, meeny, miny, mo" over them until the teacher began the morning's lesson.

Another indication of the girls' definition of reading was the kind of books they selected from the classroom book table and bookshelves. Both girls often chose basal readers and teachers' editions of basals. These books, some of them more than fifteen years old, had been placed among trade books, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and magazines on the table and in the shelves. Tracey and Sally chose them but were not observed reading them. Sally found an old basal reader in the library and checked it out. The girls' book choices suggested that reading was associated with teacher-directed lessons and teacher-selected materials. Reading was work one did in school with teachers.

Other evidence of the girls' definition of reading was their behavior during the required 30-minute reading period after lunch. During this time the children were allowed to interact with one another but only if books were the focus of their interactions. Whereas some children chose to read at their desks, Sally and Tracey were most often involved with other children during this time. A commonly observed activity was playing school:

Sally pulls her chair up to Donna and Shelley.

Sally: We can play school.

Donna: I'm the teacher. I'm reading the book.

Sally opens Sun and Shadow (a basal reader) and reads aloud.

Shelley: I'm going to read you a story.

Teacher: You may choose now what you would like to play.

Sally and Shelley drop their books on Donna's lap and dash to the playhouse.

Donna looks up: Gosh, I got all the books.

Not only did Sally define the activity as schoolwork, but she read from a school book. When Sally was asked how people learn to read, she talked about starting in "the first book" and going through "the different levels." Again, she indicated a view of reading as work one did in school. When the work period was over, as in the school episode described above, Sally dumped her book and headed off to play. For Sally and Tracey and for the low group children, a schoolwork definition of reading influenced their reading-related activities. The same set of children shared the next definition of reading.

#### Reading Is a Source of Status

Analysis of the kinds of remarks children made about books and reading in this classroom suggested a third actively utilized definition of reading. Many of children's comments could be characterized as "look at me" statements, or statements which served to draw the attention of others to the speaker's activities. The following are examples of this frequently observed kind of remark:

Lizzie: Mrs. Saunders, wanna see my book?

Joseph: This is a good story. I got so many books!

Richard: Anybody can read these old books. See? Run, run, run.

Richard: I read that book right here and this one.

Mike: Man, I can't find no book! . . . Oh, yeh! Just the book I been lookin' for!

Lizzie: I got me a great book!

Richard to Jason: She (teacher) said I did good!

Children always clearly announced these statements to someone or to a group. The public nature of these self-asserting comments suggested that not only did some children recognize the great value placed on

reading, but that they defined reading as a source of status. Interactions among some of the low group boys further supported the existence and utilization of the status definition:

Mike: Look, two new books!

Joseph: Oooo, could I have this one?

Richard: Here the good books, man!

These boys often gathered noisily at the book table. They exclaimed, demanded, and announced their intentions for all to hear. Often they would leave the table empty-handed, suggesting that the performance was more important than the books themselves. The following remarks were typical:

Mike: I'm gonna get me a good better book today!

Richard to Bonnie: Uh-uh! You ain't taking these! (He grabs several books from her.)

Richard looks at pictures in a book: My daddy has more cars than this. He has 'em all around the house. They go all over the brick wall.

Mike: This was a fun book! I know what all these books are about.

Mike's reading behavior clearly reflected the influence of the status definition. Not only did he always read aloud, but always in the presence of someone, usually an adult. When he read, he frequently looked at the person or people near him as if to be sure they were attending to him. Mike was one of the few children who regularly approached the researcher. Often he wanted to read aloud. At other times he confidently explained things to the researcher, as in the following incidents:

Mike: Look at this book about animals! Look at these dinosaurs here! (He holds up the books.) Finally! I found a good book. This is football. (It's a magazine.) Just sign it, and you go to football practice. Right here, see? (He points to a coupon.) Name, order, sign,



care. (The words are name, organization, state, city.)  
You like swimming? Look--just sign up and you go swimming!  
You like soccer? Just sign and you go.

Researcher sits by the book table. Mike walks to the table  
and begins picking up books. As he picks one up he says:  
See this one? This is an easy one. I can read this one.

Mike's reading-related behavior and comments indicated that he was attuned to the recognition and status given to readers in this classroom. He went so far as to claim that he was the best reader in the class, the only low group child to do so. Reading for Mike was a public act. It was associated with asserting his superior position among peers--a means of achieving high status in the classroom community.

Although Joseph and Richard also utilized a status definition of reading, they exhibited the definition differently from Mike. Joseph and Richard were unskilled word-callers. They knew many fewer words than Mike and consequently did not often loudly broadcast their oral reading, as did Mike. Nevertheless, the boys demonstrated the status definition in other behaviors. Both frequently grabbed books from other children, for no apparent reason other than to assert their superior positions as the ones who had the desirable books. They also were observed to carry piles of books to their desks, where they would often sit unopened while the boys played with friends at neighboring desks. Evidently, the public display of choosing books from the book table was more important than anything they might do with the books once they arrived at their seats. This is not to say that the boys were never actively engaged with books at their seats. But even in these situations reading often became a competitive enterprise, as this excerpt from fieldnotes illustrates:

Richard turns the pages of Clifford's Riddles.

Richard to the researcher: I bet this dog will pull the building.

Researcher: He will?

Richard: He's really big, see? (He shows a picture at the beginning of the story.)

Joseph looks over and says: That ain't the same dog!

Richard: Uh-huh! Watch, he's gonna change. Want me to show you the whole book?

Low group children were not alone in defining reading as a source of status. Tracey and Sally clearly used this definition to guide their behavior in public contexts. As discussed earlier, these two girls did not often choose to read during free-choice periods. However, when the teacher announced that people who finished reading 10 books and recording the titles would get a sticker and a candy cane, Tracey and Sally became very busy with books. Sally immediately took three books from the book table and, returning to her seat, rapidly turned through the pages of each book. Although she turned each page, she could not possibly have read the pages as quickly as she turned them. Soon Sally was standing, booklist in hand, by the teacher. After showing her list to the teacher, she walked to the researcher and said, "Ms. Bondy, I was the first one to finish the whole page." The researcher responded, "All 10 books?" Sally replied, "Yeh, the first one."

During this time, Tracey sat at her desk, a pile of books in one corner. She hastily turned pages and recorded titles. Tracey appeared to have orchestrated a more efficient system than Sally, as she had other children transporting books for her:

Robin to Tracey: You should read this poem book. It's got lots of easy poems.

Tracey: I'll read it if you put this one back.

Lynn presents a book to Tracey: Tracey, read this book, it's cinch. It's about Stanley, and you'll love it.  
Tracey looks up: No, I don't want to.

As Tracey added books to her list, Sally worked on her second list.

Lynn provided periodic news bulletins:

Lynn to Sally: Tracey only has three more books and she gots them all.

Lynn to Mrs. Saunders: Mrs. Saunders, Tracey only has to write the book, and she'll be done.

Having recorded the tenth title, Tracey closed her folder and dashed to Mrs. Saunders to announce, "I'm finished." She chose a red candy cane from the bag and promptly displayed it to Sally and Robin.

By bringing books to sharing time, these girls and other children revealed their use of reading to gain status. In front of the whole class, children displayed books they had brought from home. Not all children were operating under the status definition; some children were clearly more attuned to reading as a pleasurable experience or as a way to learn things, as will be discussed later. However, Tracey and Sally were guided by their definition of reading as a high-status activity. In public settings which provided opportunities for recognition, these girls, like the low group children, engaged in reading and reading-related activities. Tracey's response to the question, "What is reading?" further clarified the status definition. She said, "Like you look at a book, then you write it down in the folder, and then the next day you could read another book." Only by recording book titles could a student complete the list in the folder and become the object of teacher and peer attention. Reading was viewed as an activity done with the promise of praise, reward, and public recognition.

### Reading Is a Way to Learn Things

When interviewed, high group children talked about many more purposes and reasons for reading than low group children. These girls pointed out that reading was useful to people for a range of reasons. One reason for reading was to find out about things in one's environment. In the following excerpts from interviews, Meg, Robin, and Ellen referred to reading as a way to learn things:

Researcher: Tell me what kinds of things people read in this classroom.

Meg: Um, school books.

Researcher: What do you mean when you say school books?

Meg: I mean like reading group books.

Researcher: Oh, so sometimes they read those. What else?

Meg: Um, their own books they bring from home.

Researcher: Other things?

Meg: Yes. Sometimes they read like that box right there: "The Scott Land Clean of Fine Protection Papers."

Researcher: So sometimes people read things that are written on boxes. Other things?

Meg: Yes, like names, over there. They might read all the names on the wall there and then make a pretend book with all the names. Like this book right here. (She picks it up and reads it.)

Researcher: Why do you think people read, Meg?

Meg: Well, sometimes they read for working. And sometimes they read for playing. And sometimes they read really for teaching people. Sometimes they read to find out things, like the pages in math and the pages in handwriting. And sometimes they read to find the days, like here. (She touches the calendar.) Like Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

Researcher: What kinds of things do you read, Ellen?

Ellen: Well, in reading group I have to read level six book. Sometimes I read books I want to when it's free play.

Researcher: Are there any other things you read?

Ellen: At home I read a lot. My mom and me read together when I go to bed.

Researcher: Other things?

Ellen: Well, when I'm doing my workbook, I have to read to find out the answer. And right now. I could read off the

tape recorder. (She points to words on the machine.) And I could read from the tape. It says, "Broadway."

Researcher: Are there people at your house who read?

Ellen: Yeh, my mom is a great reader. Before the baby was born, she used to read every night, every day, every morning. She also reads at work. Lots of papers at work.

Researcher: Other things?

Ellen: Like letters and cards we get in the mail.

Researcher: So why do people read, Ellen?

Ellen: Maybe 'cause they like to. And sometimes for their work.

Researcher: Why do people read, Robin?

Robin: They might read because they just want to see what's in a book.

Researcher: Why do your mom and dad read?

Robin: Well, I think they read because they want to learn more about things. Like my dad reads his books about math things, about his programs on his computer.

Classroom observations revealed that several high group girls utilized a "reading to learn" definition in the classroom. This definition was clearly different from the schoolwork definition in that reading to learn represented voluntary activity related to the reader's curiosity, while reading as schoolwork referred to the completion of required tasks. Although Meg talked about reading as a way to "find things out," her classroom reading was guided by a reading for pleasure definition. Ellen and Robin, on the other hand, exhibited the reading to learn definition in their choice of reading materials. Both girls spent time with encyclopedias, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Ellen has the encyclopedia open at her desk. She acts as though she is conducting a lesson.

Ellen to Donna: That's a coral snake.

Donna: Wow! That looks like a cobra, there.

Ellen: This is a garter snake. This isn't a cobra.

This (she points) is a cobra.

Donna: Let me see. Oh my God!

Holly: Let me see.

Donna: She's in the snake section.

Ellen: This one is very poisonous--the coral snake.

Holly: My daddy got bit by one of those.

Ellen: It's very, very poisonous.

The teacher described another occasion on which Ellen had read in the encyclopedia about Napoleon and then reported what she had learned to the class. When the class was studying sea animals, Ellen found a book about sea horses. She looked through the book during the day and brought it to sharing time. There were several pictures she especially wanted to show the class. Robin also often selected informative books, such as How Was I Born? and My Puppy Is Born. She did not discuss her books but read them privately at her desk.

Jane presented the clearest illustration of the influence of the reading to learn definition. She often chose a volume of the encyclopedia or a dictionary and became engrossed in studying it. In the following conversation she explained her reading choices:

Jane stands at the bookshelves and reaches for a volume of the encyclopedia.

Researcher: Jane, how do you choose which one you will take?

Jane: Well, first I take one and read some parts in it. And then I go on to the next one. See, I started with A, and I read about the abacus and then some other stuff. And now I have B, and then I'll keep going through the alphabet, you know, A, B, C, D, all the way to Z.

Researcher: Why do you choose the encyclopedias and not these other books?

Jane: Well, I really like to learn things, and you learn more about things in the encyclopedias.

Jane's experiences with volume A of the encyclopedia illustrated the influence of the reading to learn definition on her behavior as a reader. She spent most of a morning reading and talking about the abacus:

Jane to researcher: Ms. Bondy, what does this say?

Researcher: Abacus.

(Jane returns to her seat. She soon approaches the researcher.)

Jane: Ms. Bondy, did you know that they couldn't do arithmetic too well on that thing with the beads because they didn't have zero on it!

Researcher: No, I didn't know that.

(Jane goes to the teacher.)

Jane: Mrs. Saunders, can I read the encyclopedia for my third smilie?

Mrs. Saunders: You get me one and show me.

Jane: I've already got one--this one. (Shows her.)

Mrs. Saunders: Choose a part and read some of it to me.

Jane: I want to read this--the abacus.

Mrs. Saunders: Read some of it to me. (Jane reads aloud.)

Mrs. Saunders: Here's what you can do. Read about one subject in the encyclopedia.

(Later, Jane approaches the teacher.)

Jane: Mrs. Saunders, I'm learning a lot about the abacus.

Mrs. Saunders: That's wonderful, Jane.

In the B volume, Jane read about Belgium and Beethoven. She kept a sheet of drawing paper on her desk and copied some of the information from the pages she read. For instance, she had written, "Ludwig Van Beethoven was born on December \_\_\_\_." She was not observed to share her "notes" with anyone.

Jane approached dictionary reading as enthusiastically as she devoured encyclopedias. When she first requested an assignment to do dictionary work, she was not entirely sure what one did with a dictionary:

Jane: Mrs. Saunders, will you write some words on the board, and then I can find them in the dictionary?

Mrs. Saunders: You mean you want me to give you some words to look up in the dictionary to find the definitions?

Jane: Yeh.

Mrs. Saunders: Okay, go get me that little dictionary.

(Jane gets the dictionary.)

Jane: What's a definition?

Mrs. Saunders: That means the little sentence that tells what the word means. (Mrs. Saunders sees that the book Jane has brought is not a dictionary. She goes to the bookcase.)

Jane to student teacher: But what's a definition?

Student teacher: A definition tells what the word means.

The next day, Jane announced to the researcher, "This is a dictionary. We have another kind of dictionary, too, with an orange cover." On

another day, she had the two dictionaries at her desk. She looked up the same word in the two books, read the definitions, and recorded the page numbers on which she found the definitions.

Jane and several of her peers were clearly influenced by a view of reading as a way to learn things. They chose to read informational books, they shared information from those books, and they seemed to "study" the information privately as an older student might, by taking notes and recording page numbers. There was no evidence to suggest that low group children utilized the same definition. Although low group children occasionally selected encyclopedias, their behavior reflected a different perspective from the high group girls. Low group children's selection of encyclopedias seemed to be a kind of imitative behavior. That is, the children seemed to be reacting to the increased attention being paid to the informational books. That they did not share the knowledge-seeking definition of the high group readers was indicated when they were observed to return volumes to the bookcase without having opened them. When the children did take the volumes to their desks, they commented on pictures much as they would comment on pictures in trade books: "Oooo, whales!" "Look at the dinosaurs!" These children seemed to utilize the status definition of reading in their limited use of informational books. Not only were encyclopedias big, heavy, easily noticed books, but there was positive recognition attached to reading them. While the high group girls read informational books to learn things, the low group children's few interactions with encyclopedias seemed to be guided by the definition of reading as a source of status.



### Reading Is a Private Pleasure

Whereas few of the low group children selected books during free-choice periods, several of the high group children regularly chose books. The nature of their interactions with selected books suggested that for these children, reading was a private pleasure.

Meg and Robin's reading behaviors typified the influence of the private pleasure definition. These two girls were frequently observed sitting alone at their desks, their eyes fixed on the pages of a book. Frequently when the majority of the class was playing in groups on the floor, in the playhouse, and at the art table, these girls sat alone and silently read. They chose a variety of books, including the easiest to decode I Can Read Books, Dr. Seuss books, poetry books, classics such as Burton's The Little House, and encyclopedias. They did not restrict themselves to particular readability levels or subject matter. Their reading experiences were supremely peaceful and private.

It is important to note that children in this classroom typically utilized more than one definition of reading. Robin's reading to learn definition influenced her behavior with some informational books, but she also used the private pleasure definition with informational books, particularly encyclopedias. For instance, she sat alone with the F volume, flipping back and forth between pages. The researcher approached her:

Researcher: What are you doing, Robin?

Robin: Well, it's about fairy tales. I'm looking at the pictures.

Researcher: Are you reading the book?

Robin: I'm mostly looking at the pictures. I like to look at the pictures. I don't like to read in big books.

Researcher: What's the best part of this book?

Robin: The pictures of the fairy tales. (She turns pages.) This is the best, "The Princess and the Pea."  
I saw the movie.

Robin was not reading to learn things but to enjoy the many colorful illustrations in the fairy tale section. Throughout the school day she often chose to read books alone at her desk. Her lips moved as she slowly edged her finger along each line of print. Often children next to her played noisily, but they did not interrupt her concentrated reading.

Whereas Robin read during periods when reading was permitted, Meg read throughout most of the day. As the teacher remarked, "Meg's got depth to her, I know she does. She sneaks reading all the time when she's supposed to be doing other things. She reads a lot, and so does Robin but Robin does it more appropriately. Meg can read anything." Unlike Robin, who was very popular and a leader among her peers, Meg was more socially isolated. Reading seemed to be a source of comfort, company, and happiness for her.

When Meg read, she buried herself in her book. She often propped the book up on her desk and rested her chin on the desk so that she was physically inside of the book. In order to see what she was doing, one had to stand very close to her. Typical behavior is illustrated in this brief description:

Meg is the only student who is reading. She has Humbug Rabbit propped up on her desk. A faint smile is on her face. Occasionally she reads words aloud and chuckles. She touches illustrations and closely inspects them with her eyes. She seems to linger over each page.

Meg readily talked about the books she read. She found personal meaning in some, as the following incident indicates:

Meg is reading the Sesame Street Book of Shapes.

Researcher: Do you like this book?

Meg: Yes. I also like this one. (She picks up My Friend Is Mrs. Jones.) But I don't have a friend. See, I'll show you where it says that. (She turns to a page and reads.)

"I hope you have a friend as nice as Mrs. Jones." I don't. My dentist is Miss Jones, though.

Sometimes Meg read in one book for an entire day. One day she brought Madeline to school. Not only did she have it open on her desk throughout the day, but when she left her desk, she carried it with her. The student teacher remarked, "She's been carrying that book around all day." Clearly the book had special meaning for Meg.

Yet another example of Meg's private pleasure definition also illustrates her curiosity about books. The teacher told Meg to bring her work up to the reading table, where the teacher sat. Perhaps if Meg were to sit next to the teacher, she would be able to complete her smilies. During this period in the afternoon, a number of children were reading books to add to their lists. Often a child brought a book to the teacher, to ask about a word or to announce that the book had been read. Some of these books were left on the reading table. Meg, who was supposed to be doing her assignments, watched the conversations between children and teacher, and retrieved the books that were left on the table. She sat quietly and read each abandoned book.

Although Meg and Robin were quickly identified as utilizing a private pleasure definition of reading due to the frequency with which they displayed pleasure reading behavior, Jane and Ellen also utilized this definition. All of these girls chose to spend time alone with books and enjoyed them. After finishing with an encyclopedia, Jane sat at her desk with Mr. Brown Can Moo. As she read, she made sound

effects. When the page said, "Tick tock," she made clicking noises with her tongue and tipped her head rhythmically to the right and to the left. On the next page was the word "GRUM" and a character who appeared to be grumbling. She made noises and motions like those of the character. Jane and the other girls talked about reading for pleasure when they were interviewed. They all said they liked to read at home. When asked, "Why do people read?" they had the following responses:

Robin: They read because they have the feeling to read.

Jane: People just like to read. Like me. I like to read.

Ellen: Because it's fun and it isn't getting all hyped up and running around and stuff like that. And it's fun. I like to read a lot.

Meg: Sometimes people read for playing.

Interviews and observations provided evidence that some children in this classroom had constructed a definition of reading as a private pleasure. The same children as well as some others were influenced by the next definition of reading.

### Reading Is a Social Activity

All of the high group girls, with the exception of Meg, often engaged in reading activities which involved at least one other person. During these social occasions reading was a shared activity which linked individuals together as pairs or groups. These occasions often had a game-like quality to them. Girls who defined reading as a social activity had fun with friends by reading together.

Some of the observed social reading centered around books. For instance, girls often read aloud to one another as they sat with newly

selected library books. Groups would also cluster around an individual with an open book and walk slowly back to the classroom, reading in unison as they inched along. Books purchased at the book fair were the focus of social occasions for some. When Jane returned with a new book, she immediately showed it to Donna, saying, "It's a Barbie book." The two sat together and turned through the pages. Some children used riddle books to have fun with friends. Tracey and Susie often chose More Riddles from the book table and spent time giggling over it together. Tracey would read the riddles to Susie, who was supposed to guess the answer. With practice, Susie became a better guesser. It often seemed that Susie did not understand the joke, but this did not inhibit her laughter. The two girls enjoyed going through the motions of posing the questions and attempting the answers. The following are examples of social fun with the riddle book:

Tracey: When can three big women go out under one little umbrella and not get wet?

Susie: It isn't raining.

Tracey: When it is not raining. (giggles)

Tracey: Why did the little boy put ice in his father's bed?

Susie: Because he was cold.

Tracey: Because he liked cold pop!

Tracey: What sings, has four legs, is yellow, and weighs 1,000 pounds?

Susie: I don't know.

Tracey: Two 500-pound canaries! (giggles)

On another day:

Tracey: What sings, has four legs, is yellow, and weighs 1,000 pounds?

Susie: Birds.

Tracey: Two 500-pound canaries.

The two girls look wide-eyed at each other.

Tracey: Oooo, that's big. What is the best thing to put into a pie?

Susie: Some pie stuff.

Tracey: Your teeth! (giggles)

Interestingly, Susie was the only low group child who utilized the social definition of reading. An explanation could be related to the location of her desk. Susie sat next to Tracey, a member of the high group and a skilled word-caller. Although Tracey was not a voracious reader, she read during the periods when reading was expected. Susie may have constructed the social reading definition through her exposure to Tracey, who was both friendly and able to read many more words than Susie.

Other instances of reading as a social activity centered around the use of small chalkboards. These game-like situations tended to take the form of "playing school." In the following example, the girls played at being teachers:

Jane, Tracey, and Lynn sit together with chalkboards.  
Jane to researcher: You wanna know what I'm doing? I'm playing school, that's what I'm doing.  
Tracey: I'm putting the bad people and the good people.  
Lynn: Kevin B! (He's standing by her.)  
Kevin B.: Jane Taylor!  
Lynn: Uh uh! Jane's good! (She points to the "good" list.)  
Jane looks up: I am good.  
(Jane has written "Miss Saunders" on her board.)  
Jane to researcher: What does this say?  
Researcher: I don't know. What does it say?  
Jane: Mrs. Saunders. I am Mrs. Saunders.  
Tracey: No! I'm Mrs. Saunders.  
Jane: Oh. (She erases.) How do you spell Carlson?  
(Student teacher)  
Tracey reads her two lists to Kevin B.  
Lynn copies the names from Tracey's board.

Robin and Sally also used the chalkboards to write and read words and phrases to one another. For instance, Robin once wrote, "Sally bad" and drew a sad face underneath. Sally read the message and moved on to the playhouse. On another day, Robin wrote "daddy" on her board,

and Sally wrote "mamma." Robin asked Sally, "I wrote daddy. Do I get a star?"

Social reading also occurred when girls played school with books and word charts. Girls read to one another and "tested" one another's reading, as in the following example:

Jane, Sally, and Holly stand together by the word chart.

Jane to Sally: Have you ever been tested before?

Sally shakes her head no.

Jane: Read these words.

Sally reads the two lists. It is then Holly's turn.

When Holly hesitates on "wig," Sally points to a picture of a wig.

Sally: Does that give you a hint?

Bonnie joins the group.

Jane to Bonnie: I'll say all of them for you first and then we'll go back over them. I'll tell you which family they're in, okay?

Jane also had people read to her from books, as in the following illustration:

Jane to Alex: Now this is a second-grade level reader, so you're gonna have to--It's called Janet and Mark. I want you to try to read this story. (She points to each word as he reads. He hesitates on "Mark.")

Jane: That's mmmark, mark, like a bookmark. Just remember bookmark, okay?

(Alex hesitates on "jump.")

Jane: Jump. Just think of bouncing, you know and say jump. Wait just a minute, I'll be back. (She gets a piece of paper.)

Jane to Melissa: Will you hold this, Melissa? You be my assistant.

Jane to Alex: Alex, how do you spell your name?

The children who defined reading as a social activity were children who liked to play with friends and who, for the most part, were the more skilled readers in the class. Social reading was a playful activity. The children not only chose to be together, but they chose to read together. Low group children did not engage in social reading. Although they did interact over reading materials, their interactions were

of a different nature than those of the social readers. Low group children asked one another questions about assignments: "What's this word?" "How do you do this?" These kinds of questions and the responses were work-related. They lacked the playful quality of the social readers' interactions over print. Low group children's interactions reflected the first three definitions discussed--reading is saying words, reading is schoolwork, and reading is a source of social status.

In this chapter six definitions of reading constructed and utilized by first-grade children have been described. The first three definitions were used primarily by low group children, while the last three directed the behavior of most of the high group children. Some of the definitions were shared by children in both groups. For instance, one low group girl used the social reading definition, while two high group girls clearly defined reading as schoolwork and as a source of status. Although most of the children used more than one definition of reading, some, such as Meg, were observed to use only one. Important questions remain to be answered about the definitions of reading constructed in this classroom: How were these definitions constructed? Why did children construct some definitions and not others?

The researcher assumed from the outset that definition construction was an interactive process. Data analysis revealed that a formidable component of reading-related classroom interactions was the teacher's instructional practice. That is, children's definitions of reading reflected the interaction of the teacher's practices with the children's attitudes, perspectives, and abilities. In the next chapter the teacher's practices which contributed to children's definitions



of reading are described. In addition, the children's contributions to the defining process are discussed.

#### CHAPTER IV CHILDREN'S DEFINITIONS OF READING: PRODUCTS OF AN INTERACTIVE PROCESS

According to the social-interaction perspective, individuals assign meaning to the things of their world through their interactions in social contexts. These meanings, or definitions, are not inherent in objects, but are the products of social interaction. The definitions of reading constructed by children in the first-grade classroom observed for this study arose out of the interaction between the teacher's practices and the notions of reading with which children entered the classroom. Neither the teacher's practices alone nor the children's entering capacities can sufficiently explain the definitions utilized by children in the classroom. Rather, children's definitions must be viewed as the products of child-teacher interactions.

Other researchers have pointed to the significant impact of teacher practice on students' perceptions of reading (Mosenthal, 1983; Roth, 1980, 1983). These studies have focused on the development of one, classroom-wide definition, the teacher's definition. The teacher was seen as the primary definer of reading who passed her definition on to students. The students adopted the teacher's definition and used it to direct their reading behavior. In the present study the teacher and the students were found to utilize several definitions of reading. Definitions were not shared among all students, and most students used

more than one definition. Although the teacher had great bearing on the definitions constructed in this classroom, the children contributed to the process of definition construction. Before the teacher's practices are discussed, some background will be provided on the children's contributions.

### Children's Entering Views of Reading

#### Low Group

The low group children entered first grade with limited notions of reading. Their kindergarten teachers described them as working on readiness activities. Most of the children were described as being slow to catch on to beginning reading skills. Typical were these comments regarding Tommy:

He was doing reading readiness kinds of things. It took him a long time to remember the letters. He wasn't consistent--sometimes he would remember letters and sometimes he wouldn't. From one day to the next he would forget.

Six of the nine low readers were recommended for summer school following kindergarten. As one teacher remarked about Melissa, "I was afraid she might lose it, lose what she had learned." Some of the teachers spoke less optimistically about their former students. Sharon's teacher, for instance, said, "She was in a readiness group and didn't even finish level one. She had to go to summer school." While Melissa's teacher thought summer school would help the child maintain the progress she had made, Sharon's teacher recommended summer school because her student had made little or no progress in kindergarten.

Sharon and most of the other children in her group were not viewed by their kindergarten teachers as having much interest in reading. The teachers mentioned that these children did not exhibit interest in reading and did not choose to read during free time. Sharon's teacher said, "She wouldn't sit long enough to be interested. She would never choose books on her own."

Kindergarten teachers described four of the low group children as being socially immature. All four received unsatisfactory marks in social development throughout the kindergarten year. Their records indicated that they had trouble following rules, working with others, and respecting authority. Three of the children were evaluated by the speech and language specialist for language delay problems.

Observation and interview data from the beginning of first grade indicated that these children did indeed have a very limited notion of reading. When asked, "Why do people read?" the children all said that people read to learn how to read. This narrow view of the purposes and reasons for reading stood in stark contrast to the wide range of responses given to the same question by high group children. An analysis of low group children's reading errors provided further evidence of their perspective of reading. The children made numerous mistakes concerning basic concepts of written language. They repeatedly struggled with the following concepts: letters are read from left to right, words are read from left to right, pages are read from top to bottom, books are read from front to back. In the following fieldnote excerpt, Jason exhibits his confusion about reading:

Jason is going to read the researcher a story. He has the book open to page six.

Researcher: Where is the beginning of the story?

Jason: Uh, I don't know.

Researcher: This looks like page six. Where is page one?

Jason: I think it's back here. (He turns toward the back of the book. He looks at the page numbers as he turns.)

Jason: Oh. I think one is this way. (He turns toward front of book.)

Researcher: What is the title?

Jason: I don't know.

Researcher: Where does it tell the title?

Jason: I don't know.

(Researcher turns to the title page.)

Researcher: Do you know what tells the title on this page?

Jason: No.

(Researcher points to "RUN!")

Researcher: Do you know what that says? (This is one of the words in the pre-primer.)

Jason: No.

Researcher: That word is run.

Jason: Oh, I didn't know that was run. (He is accustomed to seeing "run" in lower case letters.)

(Jason stares at the copyright information. Then he looks at the researcher.)

Researcher: These words tell where the book was made. They aren't part of the story. (He turns the pages, on which there are no words, and looks at the researcher after each page.)

Researcher: Are there words to read here?

Jason: Here they are. (After several sentences written in the pattern, "Run," said Josephina, the pattern changes to, "Run," Josephina said. Jason hesitates.)

Jason: Does it go this way? (He points to "Run," then "said," then "Josephina.")

Researcher: What do you think, Jason?

Jason: I think it's this way. (He is correct.)

(Lizzie stands by Jason, looking at the page.)

Jason to Lizzie: It don't go this way, it goes this way.

(He points to the order of the words.)

The children's directionality problems showed up as they worked with words and sentences both in and out of the reading group. In the following example, Melissa tried to make a sentence with her word cards:

Melissa arranges the three words: Lad is this. The teacher asks her to read her sentence.

Melissa: This is Lad.

Teacher: Start from the beginning. You're out of order here. (Teacher points to the cards.) Melissa rearranges the cards: Lad this is.

Teacher: Where does the sentence start? Way down here. (She points.)

Melissa changes the cards: This Lad is.

Teacher: Read them as I point to them.

Melissa reads: This--Lad--is.

Teacher: You have to start the sentence way over here.

(Teacher rearranges the cards.)

At their seats the children frequently made mistakes on written assignments because they scrambled letter and word orders.

Not only did the children have trouble with these so often taken-for-granted conventions of print, but they regularly confused the metalanguage of reading. The metalanguage of reading refers to the language which is used to talk about reading. Wrote Olson (1984), "It is in the metalanguage that the concepts critical to literacy are carried" (p. 190). Low group children often confused the concepts of letter, sound, word, and sentence, as the following examples illustrate:

Teacher to the reading group: Say those letters that are vowels.

(Students recite them with the teacher, several times.)

Teacher: What's so special about those vowels?

Susie: They got two words.

Teacher: They've got two--?

Susie: Letters.

Teacher: Well, they are letters, but they've got two--

Lizzie: Sounds.

Teacher: Yes, sounds.

Richard is working on a workbook page. The sentence says, "Sid hid the lid."

Researcher: Tell me what the sentence says.

(Richard looks at the page. He looks at the researcher.)

Researcher: Where does the sentence start?

(Richard looks at the researcher.)

Researcher: Show me the first word in the sentence.

Richard: S?

Researcher: Show me the word that starts the sentence.

(Richard looks at the researcher.)

Teacher points to the word "playhouse": "Playhouse" is a word that's made up of two words. What are the two words in playhouse?

Mike: H and P.

Teacher: No, not two letters. The two words.

Richard: P and L.

Teacher: No, two words. Look--play (she points) and house. What's the first word?

Students: Play.

Teacher: Yes. P-l-a-y is play.

The children's vague and confused notions about reading would lead some researchers to suggest that they lacked cognitive clarity about the reading process (Downing, 1979). Cognitive clarity related to reading refers to clear understanding of the purpose and the technical characteristics of reading. Downing (1982) summarized the results of many investigations into these two prerequisites of reading skill acquisition and stated, "There are clear indications that beginning readers are not at all clear about the communication process and may experience cognitive confusion in moving from audible to visible language" (p. 111). In order to become readers, children must achieve cognitive clarity. According to Olson (1984), "To understand talk about language and to think about language or to be taught about language, the child must have access to the concepts represented in the metalanguage" (p. 191). The teacher recognized that some of the children were struggling with reading. She was concerned about four of the children in particular, and referred to them as "fragile readers." She explained:

They're just so sporadic as far as what they know and don't know. That's what concerns me. Sometimes I'll feel like they've really got a hold on what this all is, but then other times, it just goes. Every year I have some children where it's just not sticking in there. They seem to lose it, and if they don't do something through the summer--they're so

fragile, such fragile readers--they're going to lose a lot. They'll lose a lot of the words they know because it's not all coming together to be any kind of a process for them. Those are my signals--if it's just not making sense to them.

The teacher's description and the recorded observations of the children's behavior support the possibility that many of the low group children lacked cognitive clarity about reading. They entered first grade with limited and perhaps confused notions about reading. A number of them were not even interested in reading. The teacher pointed this out when she referred to one child as having "a different agenda":

Researcher: What do you think about Joseph's reading?

Teacher: I think he has another agenda, some kids do. I think he's more interested in the other children, in playing around. He's not really interested in reading. I really need to put him in intensive care--I call it that--to try to change his agenda. If they've got that other stuff going on, they're not going to focus in on reading. So I have to give him a lot of positive [feedback] in order to change his agenda for school.

To summarize, the low group children entered the classroom with simplistic, limited, and confused notions about reading. Many of them had shown little interest in reading and little skill in basic reading concepts. Some were described as socially immature and some as having delayed language development. Most of them attended summer school following their kindergarten year. The attitudes and abilities with which these children entered Mrs. Saunders' classroom were strikingly different from those of the high group children.

### High Group

A kindergarten teacher who knew five of the six high group girls remarked, "A common thread through these girls was the achieving need.



More than wanting to play, to pretend, these girls wanted to achieve." The girls were described as being "open for whatever school was going to be" and as possessing an "academic endurance" greater than the typical kindergarten child. Most of them were described as having "a sense of confidence." Regarding Tracey the teacher said, "She knew she could take the world by storm." This teacher also stressed the involvement of the girls' parents in their education. Robin's parents, the teacher explained, "have real high academic expectations. . . . They programmed their computer with her curriculum." Tracey's mother was quoted as saying, "Oh, Tracey can do that. We'll do that at home." The teacher remembered Tracey's mother as saying she was always waiting to see what Tracey could do next. After describing each girl individually, the teacher made a general comment about their parents:

All of those girls have two parents who come to open house. At that time I explain how many words are in each book and what the parents can do to back me up. I make everything clear from the beginning. The parents know just what to do. They're the kinds of parents who say, "What do you want? We're gonna do this right!" I don't see that with all the kids.

According to parental reports in the children's cumulative records, most of the girls were reading before they began kindergarten. They wrote the following sorts of comments:

Jane shows interest in reading; reads alone; writes or copies everything; puts together wonderful, complex games.

Meg reads well.

Ellen reads daily. She writes letters and notes.

Tracey loves to be read to. She tries to read by herself. She can write her name and most of the alphabet.

We read with Robin daily. She can read simple words and beginner level Dr. Seuss books. She writes us notes and draws pictures.

Sally loves books.

Some of the girls talked about learning to read before kindergarten, as illustrated in the following examples:

Jane: I was trying to read when I was two years old. I was just sounding words out very slowly. My parents helped me with the words. (Jane's mother mentioned to the researcher that Jane was beginning to read words when she was still two.)

Robin: I started to read when I was four. And I read a lot at home. We were in Key West and my mom bought some flashcards, and I learned some of those words there, in Key West.

Meg: I started off coloring, and then I started reading. I just taught myself. I could sound out the abc's, so I know a lot of words.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the high group girls entered first grade with more extensively developed views of the purposes and functions of reading than the low group children. The girls talked about a variety of reasons for reading and discussed their home experiences with reading. Not only did most of the girls report reading alone and reading with a family member, but some talked about reading things they had written. For instance, Tracey said, "When I see Fraggles Rock [on television], I remember in my mind and write down what she said. And then I could read it after I wrote it down." Ellen talked about typing words on her mother's typewriter at work:

Well, I think up words and I type them every time I get a chance to go to her work. I type words, and then I read them, and then my mom's friend Karen reads them. Like I write my friends' names: Hilary Elizabeth Nelson, Bradley Banks--he doesn't have a middle name. Then I read them.

Most of the girls also talked about their parents as readers. When asked, "Are there any people at your house who read?" they responded similarly to Jane:

Jane: Well, my daddy does a lot of reading, because we went to the library and he got a lot of books. And my mommy reads a whole lot. That's about all she ever does.

Reading seemed to be a familiar part of the girls' environments. They saw reading being used for a variety of purposes, and they regularly experimented with different uses of written language. Most of the girls entered first grade with a more sophisticated view of reading than any of the low group children. However, two of the girls were somewhat different from the rest of their group. The differences are important because they have bearing on the definitions the girls constructed in the classroom.

While four of the high group girls could be characterized as independent workers and learners, Tracey and Sally were clearly more teacher-dependent and teacher-oriented. These girls always did precisely what the teacher said to do. They worked when they were told, they cleaned up when told, they helped other children when told, and they read when the teacher said it was time to read. These were the girls who always looked immediately to the teacher when she called for the class's attention and who raised their hands to answer questions she asked of the group. They delivered messages for the teacher and ran special errands for her.

When describing her students, Mrs. Saunders said, "See, Tracey is a good little student, and she'll do fine on the tests because I want her to." In describing Sally, Mrs. Saunders spoke more of the gaps in

her skills: "She's a mystery because she's so bright, but she's got gaps as far as mechanics are concerned, that show up on testing. It seems she went so fast she just never bothered to learn how to do certain things." Sally's kindergarten teacher described her as the lowest one in her reading group last year. Sally had to struggle to keep up with the pace set by the other girls. She was also the youngest girl in the class and the only child who had not attended nursery school. Sally's comments about reading were similar to Tracey's and both girls differed from the rest of their group. When asked, "Why do people read?" Tracey and Sally responded in a way similar to the low group. Their responses follow:

Tracey: To learn the words that are in the book.

Sally: To get better so if they ever grew up they wouldn't make mistakes on reading or reading tests.

These answers suggest a strong school orientation which was not as apparent among their peers. Although the other girls were, for the most part, hard workers and high achievers, they did not align themselves as closely with the teacher and with schoolwork as did Tracey and Sally. Evidence of Tracey's dependent nature was provided by the school psychologist who had tested her for the school's gifted program. The psychologist wrote, "Tracey displayed a tendency to give up early on difficult tasks and was somewhat dependent on feedback from the examiner as she engaged in problem-solving activities." In the classroom, both girls tended to be more dependent on the teacher than the other girls in their group.

In summary, high and low reading group children entered Mrs. Saunders' classroom with different orientations to the reading process.

Low group children had more limited views of reading, some had little interest in reading, and most had little sense of the purpose of reading. High group children tended to be more familiar with reading and its many functions.

### Teachers' Practices

Upon entering Mrs. Saunders' classroom, the children encountered instructional practices which influenced their definitions of reading. These definitions emerged out of the interactions between the teacher and the children. Below, each definition of reading found in the class is explained in terms of the interaction between teacher practice and children's attitudes and abilities.

#### Reading Is Saying Words Correctly

The teacher's instructional practices clearly contributed to the children's definition of reading as saying words correctly. Discussion of this definition will include three parts: the teacher's comments about learning to read, her instructional practices in the low reading group, and her instructional practices involving the whole class. Analysis of these areas reveals that a clear message was persistently sent to children in this classroom: Reading is saying words correctly.

When asked what she would do with her low group children if she had only ten minutes to work with them, Mrs. Saunders replied:

I think I would do vocabulary because that's basically what it's all about, you know. . . . My theory is they need to know a lot of words before they can hook up to the

phonics program because they don't even know what they're doing when they start to sound out a word. . . . I try to get them as much vocabulary before I turn them over to the phonics program, so that they can know what they're doing there.

Mrs. Saunders' view was that children needed to learn some words in order to be able to sound out more words at a later stage. When she talked about the children who she believed were having the most trouble with reading, she cited the words criterion as the most important indicator. She pointed to remembering sight words and knowing the consonant sounds as the two signals of reading trouble in low group children. She expressed concern about children who seemed to forget the words from day to day and said that the best way for parents to help low group children with their reading was to flash word cards: "I guess if they're going to do anything for just five minutes it would be to flash the words." Mrs. Saunders referred to "pure reading" as word calling and said that her high group children had to go beyond pure reading:

Their skills are so good as far as decoding is concerned that I don't really have to spend too much time with them on that. They've got it, and I don't want to mess with it. At their level they need to be doing things like more understanding of the story, more comprehension reading, more understanding of word meaning. If I had ten minutes with them, I'd probably sit there and talk about books they had read. I feel most of their instruction is done independently. They're really instructing themselves because they are so highly motivated to read.

In her comments about learning to read, Mrs. Saunders repeatedly referred to the importance of knowing words. In her view, being able to say the words defined reading for the low group children. Although knowing words was important for high group children too, there were other priorities for children at that level. Mrs. Saunders' instructional

practices within the low reading group stressed the words-based orientation to reading.

On the first day that the reading group met, Mrs. Saunders explained to the children what they would be doing during group time:

Teacher: This is what reading group is. It's a fun time for us to be together. But you know what, there are some things we have to do. Richard still has his hands in his lap and that's so nice. We have to be listening because I will ask questions, and sometimes one person will answer, sometimes we'll all answer together. While you're here, what do you think we'll be doing?

Sharon: Math.

Teacher: No, we'll do math another time. What will you do when you come?

Sharon: Our papers.

Teacher: Yes, but what will we do up here in our group? (Children stare at her.)

Teacher: We'll be reading in a book. We'll look at the book tomorrow. It's a beautiful book, full of people you'll want to know about. Do you know some of these words already? Do you know who this boy is?

Children: Bill.

Teacher: Well, you already know some words. You already know how to read.

These children entered the classroom unsure about what happened in reading groups. Mrs. Saunders introduced them to the significance of saying the words correctly on the very first day of the group. Her manner of conducting the group, which met daily for approximately 20 minutes, served to reinforce the words-based definition of reading.

An analysis of reading group periods revealed that several activities composed the majority of group time. The children read words on cards, they received new word cards, they read in unison from the pre-primer and workbook, and they completed workbook pages together. In all of these activities, the children's attention was focused on words.

Reading words on cards, as discussed in the previous chapter, was a standard part of the reading lesson. The teacher typically told the

group the number of words each child had to read correctly in order to get a "treat." The teacher showed a card to a child, and if the child said the word correctly, he or she kept the card. Cards were shown until each child had said the predetermined number of words correctly, and then the children received a cracker or piece of candy as a treat. The teacher often distributed new word cards, rarely more than one new card per day. Typically she had the children do something with the new card. For instance, she might have each child say the new word, or, in the case of rhyming words, she might ask what the new word had in common with a word they already had.

Reading in the pre-primer was nearly always done in unison. Mrs. Saunders directed the group to read together:

Teacher: When I say, go, go. Go!

Children: Bill-is-not-here.

Teacher: Bill is not here. Do you see him in the picture?

Children: No.

Teacher: Then you are right. Put your finger on the next sentence, and when I say go, go. Go!

Children: Jill-is-not-here.

Mrs. Saunders referred to this kind of reading as "singing reading" because it was supposed to be done "all together." When the children did not say the words together, the teacher corrected them and had them reread, as illustrated below:

Teacher to Mike: I'm glad you're such a fast reader, but when we read together, I'd like you to stay with us.

Teacher: We've got to start again. (The children begin.)

Teacher: Uh-uh! I'm going to say go. It starts with "Ben." I'm giving Melissa a treat because she's doing it just as we like it.

Mrs. Saunders expected to hear all of the children's voices, clearly pronouncing each word. Even the children's workbook pages often



involved saying isolated words and phrases. For example, the children frequently had to trace words and fill in missing letters of words. They also had to circle words and sentences which identified pictures.

The teacher used other practices which served to emphasize the importance of words to the low group children. For example, when children misread words, she most often corrected them by focusing on the word itself. She frequently directed the child's attention to the sounds of the letters. She also often supplied the correct word immediately. Once when Sharon inserted a word in a sentence, Mrs. Saunders remarked, "When you read, you can't make up any words in there. Like Sharon put in 'can,' but you can't do that. You have to read just what's there."

Other comments Mrs. Saunders made to her low group children stressed the words-based orientation to reading. For instance, when Sharon brought a pair of non-prescription eye glasses to school, the children in her group wanted to know why she was not wearing them for reading. Once the teacher had determined that they were in fact "play glasses," she said, "Sharon probably would like to have some glasses like yours, Richard, because they're like magical glasses! You can read so well with them."

On another occasion she commented on the importance of seeing the words. Jason brought Mrs. Saunders a completed puzzle, and the teacher remarked, "You did a good job, Jason. That's very good for your eyes. It can help you be a better reader because you really have to look." These kinds of comments reflected a view of reading as primarily a visual act involving seeing words and then saying them correctly.

In the low reading group Mrs. Saunders developed the view of reading as saying words correctly. In whole class activities she further developed the words-based perspective on reading. The teacher's instructional practices in activities involving all the children are described below.

Two activities which directly stressed word calling included lessons associated with a phonics workbook and worksheets based on "basic reading vocabulary" ("BRV") words. Children worked on BRV worksheets daily and in the phonics workbook about three days each week. The first time Mrs. Saunders mentioned the phonics program to the researcher, she called it "very boring for some, but right on target for others." When asked to say more about the program, she explained her reasons for using it:

Through the years of having our basal series, the phonics part seemed like it was not well-organized. The decoding is the weak link in the basal. We've always talked about supplementing it with something. So way back in the spring, I ordered the phonics books with that in mind. At the time I didn't know exactly how I'd use them--in groups or for the whole class. But I was influenced when I read the Marva Collins book because she is such a phonics person, and she took kids who were three and four grade levels below and gave them an organized phonics program, and amazing things happened. I'm using a lot of rewards with it because it's boring. But it's the mechanics that will have the end result of helping them sound out the words that can be sounded out in our language.

Phonics lessons involved guiding the class through several pages in the workbook. Mrs. Saunders often commented, "This is helping you sound out words." She stressed the sound being presented in a particular page and had the class repeat the sound several times. The exercises required students to focus on one-syllable words, by circling the word

that identified the picture or completed the sentence. She called on individuals to read sentences aloud and circulated around the room to check children's answers.

The BRV worksheets were designed to give children practice with BRV words. Each week the class had a new list of BRV words, and each day the children did one worksheet based on the words of the week. Every Friday the children were individually tested on BRV words. The low group children had to read the list of words, while all other children had to read and spell the words. Mrs. Saunders told the class that the words were important:

These are our BRV words and you have to know these words. If you don't have one of these lists with the words on it, raise your hands because I always have extras. You have to study these because we're going to test you tomorrow.

Other whole-class activities which often reflected the teacher's concern for saying words correctly included sharing time and story time. In addition, the teacher's practice of having children read a book as an assignment on Fridays was another opportunity for communicating the message that reading is saying words correctly.

Children often brought books up to the front of the class when it was their turn to share. Typically the teacher asked if the child could read some of the words in the book, as illustrated below:

Brendon has three E.T. books. He shows the pictures in one of the books.

Teacher: Can you read any of the words in there?

Brendon: No. Look! (He shows her the print.)

Teacher: Oh, yes, that's a hard book. But I bet there are some words in there you can read.

When the teacher read books to the class, she again often focused on the words. She told the researcher:

I try to read as many interesting "I Can Read" books as I can. . . . I usually read Cat in the Hat . . . and Green Eggs and Ham. . . . I try to read a lot of them to get the kids interested in getting them on their own.

Mrs. Saunders did not restrict her story time reading to books with easy words, as will be discussed in a subsequent section. However, when she did read an I Can Read book, she told the children that the book had easy words and that many of them could read it by themselves. She placed the easy-to-read books in a large box on the book table in order to identify them for the children.

Finally, the teacher's decision to have children read a book on Friday provided more opportunities to stress the words-based view of reading. Mrs. Saunders introduced the plan to the class in the following way:

Teacher: Now we're going to start something new today. Usually I don't do this until October sometime, but now everybody has started to read in this room. Everyone is reading. On Fridays, instead of doing a center paper, you will do something different. You will read a book. But let me tell you--it has to be in a certain way. You don't just look through the pictures. You read all the words in the book. I have some books I've found for each group, books that you can read all the words in. What should you do if you're reading along and you don't know a word? (Sally raises her hand.)

Sally: Sound it out.

Teacher: You could try to sound it out. What if you still can't get it?

Kevin: You could ask a friend.

Teacher: Yes, you could ask a friend to help you. Now I'm going to show you the books for each group. . . . There are some words you might not know in here. There are some people's names you don't know, like "Jan" and "Ken." . . . Oh, there's the word "stop," too, which some of you might not know.

Mrs. Saunders later reminded the class of the rule for reading books:

Teacher: Remember the rules for reading a book. You have to promise me you'll read every word. What do you do if you come to a word you don't know?

Students: Ask a friend!

Donna: Or sound it out.

Teacher: Yes, or sound it out. Now I want you to read a different book from the one you read last week. . . . These books are all fairy tales that are written so that some of you can read them.

The teacher's habit of focusing on words not only shaped the low group children's reading group lessons, but pervaded many activities in which the whole class participated. Low group children, who entered the classroom with limited and confused notions of reading, rapidly responded to the teacher's clear message about reading. These children constructed a definition of reading as saying words correctly. High group children, who entered the classroom with a greater familiarity with the nature and purposes of reading, were not as susceptible to these teacher practices. Differences in the children's contributions to the defining process resulted in different outcomes or different definitions of reading.

### Reading Is Schoolwork

On the third day of school Mrs. Saunders talked to the class about the work they had been doing since they arrived in first grade. She associated the work they did in school with being able to read:

Teacher: Today some of you had work that was too hard. Some of it was too easy, some too hard, and I know that. I don't want you to worry about it. Someday, if you do all your smilies, you'll know more and more words and you'll be able to what?

Alex: Do second grade stuff.

Teacher: Well, yes, and you'll be able to open up a book and read it. You won't have to ask your mom or anyone. Can you believe that? It's like magic!

Three of the teacher's classroom-wide practices which developed the relationship between reading and work included requiring the children to read a book as one of their assignments every Friday, requiring a 30-minute reading period following lunch, and encouraging them to list the books they read to earn stickers and candy.

As discussed in the previous section, Mrs. Saunders clearly outlined what was required of the children in order to fulfill the Friday reading assignment. Children had to choose from among the books the teacher presented, they had to read every word in the book, they had to read a new book each week, and they had to record the book's title on a sheet in their folders. Book reading was defined as a smilie, just as other activities that were referred to as work (i.e., handwriting and math) were smilies.

When asked why she began the 30-minute post-lunch reading period, Mrs. Saunders expressed some ambivalence about the plan. She was concerned that the children might view the time as an enforced work period. However, as indicated in her comments below, she hoped that the increased time spent with books would lead to reading improvement:

I'm always looking for ways that I can get them reading more. This is sort of an enforced reading time. I'm not so sure it's a great idea because I'm forcing it. Also, I may be giving them the idea that we'll read for half an hour, and then they'll get to play. I'd rather have it that they get to play games, and then they get to read books! So I don't like that part of it, but I do like the idea that they're spending more time with books. I think the more time that you're sitting there with a book, something's got to happen.

Mrs. Saunders realized that the children might interpret her required reading period as one more assigned task in a school day composed of

required tasks and free-choice activities. As described in the previous chapter, some of the children did indeed interpret it this way.

A third practice contributing to the work definition of reading involved reading for rewards. The teacher had already established that children were to record the titles of books they had read. She added a motivating twist to the original procedure by guaranteeing stickers and candy canes to all children who finished 10 books before Christmas vacation. By providing extrinsic reinforcers for reading, the teacher may have associated reading with unpleasant tasks that one would not choose to do unless required or well-rewarded.

Most of the high group children seemed to have entered first grade with broad, flexible views of reading which enabled them to resist constructing the schoolwork definition. On the other hand, the low group children entered the classroom without the sophisticated views of reading held by high group girls. These children were influenced by the more simplistic notions of reading which pervaded classroom activity. They depended on the teacher and constructed the definitions she clearly presented to them. Tracey and Sally, despite belonging to the high group, were dependent, school-oriented children who the teacher referred to as "good little girls." They too seemed to respond to the definitions the teacher stressed throughout the school day.

#### Reading Is a Source of Status

From the first day of school Mrs. Saunders established reading as a highly valued activity in the classroom. Her attitude and the children's view were illustrated in a discussion led by the kindergarten

teacher in the adjoining room. Mrs. Saunders' students and the kindergarten class were meeting together to discuss their upcoming play:

Kindergarten teacher: The next part is about where we go after nursery school. Where do we go after nursery school?

Students: Big school.

Kindergarten teacher: Yes, big school, like here. What's one of the most important things you learn in big school?

One student: Read!

Teacher: Somebody has it.

All students: READ!

Teacher: Yes, we learn how to read.

In interviews Mrs. Saunders talked about the importance of reading and of reading group time. Some of her comments follow:

I think the most important thing [for reading teachers to know] is that the 20 or 25 minutes with the reading group is the most valuable time in the whole day. . . . Of course the interaction a teacher has with one child could be the most valuable thing that happens. What I meant was that the reading group time has to be carefully managed. It has to be a business-like time where this is really your time, and the children have to listen in a very business-like way. I think a lot of good instruction gets away because a lot of group time is spent socializing or fixing little behavior problems, so the 20 or 25 minutes goes by and hardly much information is exchanged between the teacher and the children. . . . It's just got to be understood between the child and the teacher that this is really an important time. This is the time when we're doing something that's important to you and will be important later when you go out to do your work or when that wonderful thing of reading happens to you. These are the tools that you're going to be using to help you read just hundreds of books. It's going to be so exciting. . . . That's always on my mind, that we're here because what we're doing is so important for later on. . . . You just have to be really committed to what you're doing as being really interesting and exciting. . . . You've got to hold their attention.

Mrs. Saunders' classroom practices clearly communicated the importance and value of reading of which she often spoke. She met with reading groups daily and conducted them in the manner she described in



the preceding interview excerpt. She was firm and business-like, demanding all children's complete attention and effort. She regularly used rewards to encourage appropriate behavior and with low group children, correct word calling. Reading group time was a serious, productive period for teacher and children.

A number of practices which have been described in previous sections served to stress the importance and value of reading. Upon entering the classroom in the morning, the children had the choice of reading a book, drawing a picture, or beginning their morning smilies. Reading was stressed many times during the day in activities such as handwriting, phonics lessons, BRV worksheets and tests, and story time. The children had to read a book as one of their assignments on Fridays, they had to read for 30 minutes after lunch, and they often read during sharing time. They were supposed to record the titles of books they had read and earned rewards for completing 10 books. During the school day the teacher talked often about books and reading. For example, she praised children for their reading activities, as illustrated below:

There are some wonderful things going on in this room.  
I love the people who asked me to make books.

I love that Joseph is looking for a book over there.

Oh, I love that you can read some of the words in that book!

I see Tracey really reading a riddle book to somebody.  
That is so nice!

If you have books that you are reading and want to read on--wonderful.

Mrs. Saunders also called attention to the reading achievements of groups. When the low group children passed the mastery test for the

pre-primer, she announced the news to the class and had the low group children stand to be recognized. Similarly, as children completed their lists of 10 books, Mrs. Saunders stopped classroom activity and announced their accomplishments to the group.

Yet another indication of the value placed on reading in this classroom was the going-away present the children made for the student teacher. The group assembled a book composed of pages made by each child in the class. The children wrote messages to the student teacher and drew illustrations to go with their notes. With great excitement and ceremony the children presented their gift to the departing intern.

Reading was established as a valued activity from the first day of first grade. Public recognition was awarded individuals who showed themselves to be readers, whether by passing tests, finishing 10 books, reading words correctly, or publicly choosing books from the shelf. A number of children picked up on the attention and importance assigned to reading and readers. These children constructed the definition of reading as a source of status and exhibited reading behaviors which reflected this definition. Those who utilized this definition may have been attempting to assert their superior positions in the classroom community. This interpretation is suggested by the fact that children who were more secure about their positions (high group readers) or who seemed to be oblivious to classroom status and competition (Meg and some of the low group children) did not construct the status definition of reading.

### Reading Is a Way to Learn Things

Some of Mrs. Saunders' practices influenced the construction of the reading to learn definition. In some cases she demonstrated this function of reading to the class, and at other times she responded to children's interest in reading to learn. That is, sometimes she presented informal lessons on this kind of reading, and sometimes she encouraged children's self-initiated activities in this area. The teacher's lessons typically involved the use of encyclopedias to find out more information about something a child brought for sharing time. These reading to learn lessons are illustrated below:

Alex brought his rabbit to school for sharing. After he has introduced the rabbit to the class, the teacher says: Alex, why don't you go get the "R" encyclopedia, so we can see what it says about rabbits.

(Alex gets the encyclopedia.)

Teacher: Alex, look for r-a-b. Got it?

(She looks over Alex's shoulder.)

Teacher: Alex, what's the other name for rabbits?

Alex: Bunnies!

Teacher: No, right here. (She points.) Can you sound that out? That says hares.

(The teacher picks up the encyclopedia.)

Teacher: Did you know there are lots of different kinds of rabbits? There's the jack rabbit, European rabbit, the snowshoe rabbit. These snowshoe rabbits have brown fur in the summer, and then it changes to white fur in the winter. Why do you think the fur turns white?

Mark carries a large garbage bag to the front of the room. As he pulls something out of the bag he says: I found it in the greenhouse when I moved to my house. It's a cow bone.

Teacher: What part of the cow is it?

Mark: This part, down here. (Pelvis)

Teacher: Oh, I thought it was the head. How did you find out?

Mark: I looked in the encyclopedia.

(Mark takes out another bone.)

Teacher: What part is this, Mark?

Mark: I think it might be part of the spinal cord.

Teacher: Oh, the spinal cord might go through right here.

Mark: I found this rock in my driveway.

Teacher: Does anybody know the name for someone who looks for bones and studies them?

Children call out: Scientist. Detective. Private eye.

Mark: Archeologist.

Teacher: Archeologist! That's a wonderful word. That's someone who studies ruins and things like that. I think the word for someone who studies bones is a paleontologist. Jane, will you go get the "P" encyclopedia? We can look up paleontologist.

Mrs. Saunders was also observed to introduce children to informational books, as in this incident with Meg:

Teacher: Okay, this is an encyclopedia. This one is the "F" book. That means all the things that start with "F" are in here. (She opens the book.) See, what's this?

Meg: Flag.

Teacher: Let's see if we can read a little bit about flags. (Meg reads aloud and then turns page.)

Meg: Flowers!

Teacher: Yes. You keep this, and see if you can find some things to read about in here.

Mrs. Saunders' informal lessons grew out of student interest. She capitalized on children's curiosity about particular subjects, such as rabbits and bones, to demonstrate how they could learn more about the things of their world. As described in the previous chapter, she also encouraged children's use of informational books. When Jane requested assignments in the encyclopedia and the dictionary, Mrs. Saunders readily agreed and helped Jane plan her use of the books. When Robin and Ellen found books on subjects the class had been studying, Mrs. Saunders encouraged them to bring the books to sharing time.

Although reading to learn was not a dominant feature of the reading program in this classroom, the teacher exposed children to this reading function by capitalizing on individual and class interests. Low group children, who had limited notions of the reading process and

who readily responded to the pervasive words-based view of reading, did not construct the reading to learn definition. As their main concern quickly became to say the words correctly, it was not surprising that they failed to adopt the reading to learn definition. High group girls, who were more familiar with reading and its varied uses, were more responsive to the teacher's practices in this area. Teacher practices seemed to encourage or reinforce a view of reading which the children either already had or were more prepared to adopt.

#### Reading Is a Private Pleasure and a Social Activity

Some of the teacher's practices contributed to the children's definitions of reading as private and social fun. Although children constructed two pleasure reading definitions--reading is a private pleasure and reading is a social activity--the teacher's practices did not divide into these two categories. Rather, she provided a number of experiences which reflected the view of reading as an enjoyable experience. When interviewed about her philosophy of reading instruction, Mrs. Saunders reported this view of reading as being important to her:

The most important thing is to really want to learn to read and that reading is exciting. Also that reading is something that can be the most important thing in your life. I have to remember that because I can get so caught up in teaching the skills that I forget that. I hope that's my underlying thing about reading, that it's exciting and that it's important.

Through her use of trade books with the whole class and her instructional practices with the high reading group, Mrs. Saunders contributed to the definition of reading as a pleasurable activity.

During sharing time and story time Mrs. Saunders frequently talked to the children about books. She told the researcher that she believed in "selling" books to kids by tapping their interests in particular subjects or authors. In the following fieldnote excerpts, she sells books to her students:

Teacher: If you liked this book, The Case of the Hungry Stranger, there are more books by this person, Crosby Bonsal, who I think is a woman, even though Crosby sort of sounds like a man's name. . . . If you like this book, you can look in the B's and find other books by this author.

Robin: I have The Case of the Cat's Meow.

Teacher: You do? Bring it in, Robin! There are other books that are mystery books. The Hardy Boys, and there are books about a girl named Nancy Drew. Also, there are books about a boy named Encyclopedia Brown, who is a boy who is so smart, he's a detective in his town.

A student hands the teacher a book to read for story time. It is The Egg Book by Margaret Wise Brown.

Teacher: Oh! This is Margaret Wise Brown! She has written some wonderful books! Let's do this. Let's send somebody to the library and see if we can get another book by Margaret Wise Brown.

You know sometimes you get to have favorite books. That happened to me. And sometimes you meet the people who wrote your favorite books. I met the lady who wrote these two books. She autographed one, not this one, but another one for me. This is a really special book to me. . . . Let's just enjoy this story. 'Cause this is really something. You think to yourselves, "Could this really happen?"

The teacher frequently commented on books children brought to sharing and books she or a student teacher were about to read to the class. Comments such as "This is the nicest story," "This is really an interesting book," and "I love it when you share books you have at home because we might hear about books we want to read," further stressed the view of reading as an enjoyable activity.

When Mrs. Saunders introduced new books to the class for their Friday reading assignment, she often related new books to children's

interests or shared just enough information about a book to spark children's curiosity. For instance, one day she gave the first book to Tracey, saying, "I'm going to let Tracey have the first choice because she takes ballet dancing. This is The Nutcracker by Margaret Hillert. It's the story of a ballet." On another occasion she introduced a book she had already told the children about:

Remember I told you I know the man who wrote a whole bunch of books we have in our library? Remember I said he might come in and talk to us? Well, this is Alley Alligator, one of the books he wrote. I checked it out of the library.

The books Mrs. Saunders chose to read to the class and the manner in which she read them further contributed to the pleasure reading definition. In addition to I Can Read Books, which have previously been discussed, she read "classics," books with messages, books about subjects of interest to the children, and books she enjoyed reading. She talked about her book choices in the following way:

I read some classics that children like through the years, like Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel and The Little House. Then I have my favorites, like That's the Way Mothers Are, which is really as much about teachers as it is about mothers. . . . The point is I love you because you're mine, and that's the way I want to feel about the class. I read that one for its beautiful message. And I read The Warm Fuzzy Story for the message. I try to read books with good vocabulary, good language. . . . And there are books about important things in children's lives, like losing a tooth or getting a baby brother.

When she read to children, Mrs. Saunders commented on illustrations and story line as she proceeded through the book. After telling the class a story about what Thanksgiving Day was like years ago in the north, she read Over the River and Through the Woods. Several times she stopped to comment on the illustrations:

Let's take a look at these pictures. I'm reading you this for the beautiful pictures. You've just got to see the book up close for the pictures. See, Grandma and Grandpa are at home making the turkey, and the family isn't there yet.

Mrs. Saunders read The Runaway Bunny in much the same way, commenting on the story and pictures and encouraging children to become involved in the book:

Teacher: What is a crocus?

Mark: A flower.

Teacher: Yes, it's a kind of flower. Can you see the bunny as a crocus? (She turns the page.)

Teacher: Oh, this is unbelievable! It's so beautiful! (She holds the book close to her and then slowly lifts it so they can see.)

Children: Oh, it's beautiful.

Ellen: That is really beautiful.

Upon finishing this book, Mrs. Saunders did what she so often did with books she had read to the group. She put it on the book table so that children could read it by themselves or with friends.

Mrs. Saunders conducted follow-up discussions and activities related to the books she read to the class. This practice seemed to contribute to the view of reading as an enjoyable experience. After reading The Little Engine That Could, the teacher led a discussion about how to cope with things that are hard or scary to do. Following All Kinds of Families, the children talked about their families, and Mrs. Saunders pointed out the differences among families. Children enthusiastically participated in these discussions, just as they participated in creative activities which followed the reading of some books. For instance, after a student teacher read a book about fall, the children went on a nature walk and made collages out of the objects they collected. They illustrated their favorite part of Burton's



The Little House and made ghosts based on Georgie and the Robbers. The student teacher who read Georgie and the Robbers stopped before the climax and had the class compose the ending of the story. This activity elicited as much enthusiasm from the children as did making their own ghosts. Interest and excitement were especially high, as it was three days before Halloween.

Analysis of the teacher's practices within the high reading group suggested that Mrs. Saunders contributed to this group's view of reading as a pleasurable activity. Reading lessons with high group children proceeded very differently from low group lessons. The typical sequence of events was as follows: the teacher introduced a story, she set a purpose for reading a page or pages, children read silently, the teacher asked questions, children responded, the cycle continued until the story was finished, the teacher gave directions for workbook pages, and children completed pages independently at their seats. The teacher believed that it was no longer necessary for these girls to read out loud because they needed to be concentrating on understanding what they read. The following examples illustrate the activities of the high reading group:

Teacher: Move in so you can be part of our discussion, Ellen. This story is about a little girl who has a special talent. What is a talent? What do you think, Ellen?

Ellen: It's like a show when you can do things, like sing.

Teacher: We had a talent show here last year, didn't we? So what does talent mean?

Tracey: If you're good at things.

Teacher: Talent means something special that you can do. That is a very good definition. Do you have a talent?

Sally: Reading.

Teacher: Yes, I know that's true.

Robin: Dancing.

Teacher: I've never seen you dance, but I'm sure that's true.

Tracey: Singing.

Teacher: Yes, and we know that's a talent of yours! Do you think everyone has a talent?

Girls: Yes.

Ellen: My sister has a talent. She's real strong!

Sally: Some people can flip on rings.

Teacher: Do you think it's a talent if someone is real nice to people, and everyone likes them because they care about people and are nice?

Girls: Yes.

Teacher: You know what I think? I think everybody has a talent, but they may not know what their talent is yet. I was going to tell you about this girl's talent, but I think I won't. When you hear the title, you might know. The title is "Mai Ling's Pictures." Find out what page the story begins on. (Girls look in table of contents.)

Read the next two pages and find out what's special about the balloons. This is so interesting what they're going to do with the balloons. . . . The rest of the stories in this unit are about the people who get the balloons. Take a little sneak look and see some of those people. . . . Oh, close it up! Don't spoil the surprise for later!

Mrs. Saunders conducted reading lessons with the high group much as she conducted story time with the whole class. She piqued the girls' curiosity about stories and related story events to the girls' experiences. She led discussions about stories and focused on the children's understanding of that which they had read. These practices seemed to be more closely aligned with the view of reading as an enjoyable experience than the practices which were used within the low reading group. Low group activities included reading words on cards, reading words and short sentences in unison from the pre-primer and workbook, and completing workbook pages together. In all of these activities, the children's attention was focused on words. Although low group children might have viewed word calling as a pleasurable

activity, they did not demonstrate the behaviors associated with a definition of reading as an enjoyable activity. That is, they did not become absorbed in reading, either alone or with others, during free-choice periods.

High group girls utilized the two pleasure reading definitions in this classroom. Having entered first grade possessing considerable experience with both views--reading is a private pleasure and a social activity--and being exposed to related teacher practices within the reading group and in whole class activities, it is not surprising that these definitions were constructed. The more dependent, teacher-oriented girls, Tracey and Jill, who had entered the classroom with school-oriented views of reading, did not expand their definitions to the same extent as the other girls. These girls and the low reading group children seemed to be influenced by the teacher's constant, pervasive messages regarding the words-based, schoolwork, and status views of reading. As previously described, the teacher stressed these views throughout the day, including during sharing and story times. It seems possible that children who entered the classroom with vague or limited notions about reading adopted the simplistic definition of reading as word calling and were then restricted as to the other definitions they could construct in this environment.

In this first-grade classroom children's definitions of reading were the products of an interactive process between children and teacher. While the teacher's practices reflected all six of the identified definitions, the children responded differentially to her practice. Children seemed to be more susceptible to some practices than others.

That is, while the children were exposed to the full range of teacher definitions, they did not all construct the same definitions of reading. This difference in susceptibility to teacher practice was explained in terms of differences in the experiences, skills, and attitudes with which children entered Mrs. Saunders' classroom.

Children with vague, limited notions about reading seemed to be most susceptible to the simplistic definitions of reading--reading is saying the words correctly, reading is schoolwork, reading is a source of status. Common to these three definitions is the view of reading as an externally imposed, required task. It seems reasonable that children for whom reading is not a purposeful, meaningful process would construct such definitions.

The second three definitions of reading--reading is a way to learn things, reading is a private pleasure, reading is a social activity--represent a view of reading as a personally meaningful activity. The children who constructed these definitions were for the most part those who had been extensively involved with written language prior to kindergarten. Most of the high group girls entered first grade already familiar with the purposes and functions of reading. They responded to the teacher's practices which were congruent with their ways of thinking about reading.

Children's definitions of reading in this classroom were the products of children's entering attitudes and abilities and teacher practice. The social-interaction view of definition construction provides useful information to practitioners and researchers. In the following chapter, implications of the present study are discussed.

## CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to uncover the definitions of reading constructed by first-grade children in the low ( $N = 9$ ) and high ( $N = 6$ ) reading groups in one classroom. Researchers who have investigated children's reading perceptions have tended to focus on cognitive and developmental aspects of reading. Only recently have a few researchers begun to examine children's perceptions, or what in this study are called definitions, from a social perspective. From this perspective definitions of reading are viewed as meanings individuals assign to reading as a result of their interactions in social contexts.

In order to identify these interactionally constructed definitions, the researcher observed in the studied classroom for about 150 hours during the first four months of a school year. In addition, interviews were conducted with the children, the teacher, and the children's kindergarten teachers. The data collected represented children's speech messages about reading, their reading-related behavior, and their use of reading materials. These concrete phenomena served as indicators of the less easily observed definitions of reading.

The collected data were analyzed using procedures described by Spradley (1980). First, data were organized into categories or domains of similar events. Domains which were useful in revealing children's definitions of reading included Kinds of Reading Miscues, Kinds of

Things Children Do with Chosen Books, Kinds of Statements Children Make About Books and Assignments, Kinds of Statements the Teacher Makes About Children's Reading, and Kinds of Statements Kindergarten Teachers Make About Children's Reading. Data were drawn from these domains to construct taxonomies representing definitions of reading. Six definitions were identified.

The studied children utilized the following definitions of reading:

1. Reading is saying words correctly: This definition guided the reading behavior of all low group children. They were more concerned about word-calling than making sense of the print they encountered.
2. Reading is schoolwork: Five low group children and two high group children defined reading as work, just as math, handwriting, and other assigned tasks were work. For these children reading was a task to be dispensed with quickly in order to move on to free-choice activities.
3. Reading is a source of status: Four low and two high group children utilizing this definition recognized the great value placed on reading in the classroom. They viewed reading as an activity one did in public contexts with the promise of recognition and reward.
4. Reading is a way to learn things: Three high group children constructed this definition by which they voluntarily read to find out about things in their environment.
5. Reading is a private pleasure: Four high group children constructed this definition. They chose to read books by

themselves during free-choice periods and showed signs of enjoying the private experience.

6. Reading is a social activity: Five high group children and one low group child utilized this definition. They engaged in playful reading activities with friends.

No definitions were shared by all children, and most children used more than one definition to guide their reading-related behavior. Although most low group children shared the first three definitions and most high group children shared the second three, there was not a clear differentiation according to group membership. For example, two high group girls used the schoolwork and status definitions. The failure of the groups to divide clearly by definitions served to point out the significance of individual children's contributions to the defining process. That is, children's attitudes and abilities had an impact on the definitions they constructed.

The other component in the defining process was the teacher's instructional practice. It was found that the teacher used certain practices both within reading groups and in whole-class activities which contributed to children's definition construction. In the low reading group the teacher's practices clearly communicated the words-based view of reading. This view, as well as the schoolwork and status views, were stressed throughout the school day. In the high reading group the teacher's instruction more closely reflected the pleasure reading view, a view which, along with reading to learn, received attention at certain times during the day. Both the children and the teacher contributed to the process of definition construction in the dynamic, interactive contexts of this first-grade classroom.

### Relationship of Findings to Previous Studies

Research on children's perceptions of reading has been based on the assumption that at any one point in their development, children have one way of thinking about reading which they apply in all contexts. Given this assumption, researchers have endeavored to identify children's one operative perception. Typically this has been done through interviews or tests administered under experimental conditions. Other researchers have investigated the relationship of children's perceptions to their reading achievement, finding that a significant positive relationship exists (Evanechko, Ollila, Downing, & Braun, 1973; Johns, 1972). Some studies have yielded conflicting findings. For example, while some investigators identified developmental stages in children's perceptions of reading (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982), others claimed that children's experience with reading was a more important determinant of perceptions than were developmental periods (Saracho, 1983). Similarly, while some found that young children had very vague notions of the nature of reading (Downing, 1970, 1971-1972; Reid, 1966) and that their perceptions improved as they got older (Johns & Ellis, 1976), others pointed out that even very young children were aware of print and its uses when presented with print-related tasks in meaningful contexts (Hiebert, 1981).

In the few studies which explored the teacher's role in influencing children's perceptions of reading, several investigators claimed that children adopted their teachers' perceptions. While Tovey (1976) hypothesized that this was the case, Roth (1980, 1983) and Mosenthal



(1983) demonstrated this phenomenon. In each instance, the teacher imposed a view of reading on students, resulting in one classroom-wide perception of reading. While Bloome (1982) found that middle school students defined reading in more than one way, there is as yet insufficient information available from his extensive study to attribute any role to the teachers in the studied classrooms.

The present study adds depth and breadth to the body of research on children's perceptions of reading. Much of its contribution may be attributed to the methodology utilized to examine children's perceptions. By observing students and their teacher over time and in multiple classroom contexts, the researcher gained insight into perceptions and the factors which had bearing on those perceptions. Unlike previous studies which focused on identifying children's perceptions at one moment in time, this study yielded extensive detail about children's views in a natural setting over a four-month period. The rich and varied kinds of data collected provided evidence that children's perceptions resulted from the joint contributions of children and teacher. Whereas some researchers found the teacher's practices to be the determining factor in the perceptions children adopted (Mosenthal, 1983; Roth, 1980, 1983), the teacher's contributions alone did not sufficiently explain children's definitions of reading in this classroom. Rather, attributes of the children were found to bear on the definitions that were constructed. These attributes included experiential factors as well as developmental factors, both of which have previously been cited as determining children's perceptions of reading (Downing, Ollila, & Oliver, 1975, 1977; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Hiebert, 1981; Oliver,

1975; Saracho, 1983). Children who were more familiar with print and its uses constructed the more adult-like definitions of reading (reading is a way to learn things, reading is a private pleasure, reading is a social activity). Children who entered the classroom with vaguer notions about print and who evidenced cognitive confusion about reading tended to construct the more simplistic, less meaning-oriented definitions of reading (reading is saying words correctly, reading is schoolwork, reading is a source of status). In addition to print experiences and developmental factors, children's personality characteristics seemed to influence the definitions they constructed. Children who exhibited a general pattern of dependent, school- and teacher-oriented behavior tended to respond to the teacher's most persistently stressed messages about reading.

Definition construction, then, was seen to be a social-interactive process in which children and teacher mutually developed definitions of reading. While all children shared definitions with the teacher, each child did not share all of the teacher's definitions. That is, the teacher constructed certain definitions with some children and other definitions with other children. These findings are related to those of other researchers (Allington, 1980, 1983; Collins, 1982; McDermott, 1976) who have shown that children in low and high reading groups experience quantitatively and qualitatively different kinds of reading instruction. In the present study the two groups experienced qualitatively different instruction which did appear to be associated with the construction of different definitions of reading. However, group membership did not sufficiently explain children's definitions

in the studied classroom. Ongoing observations throughout the school day revealed multiple definitions which were related to children's classroom experiences as well as extra-school experiences and developmental factors.

To summarize, the present study revealed the following findings about children's perceptions of reading:

1. In the studied classroom children constructed multiple definitions of reading.
2. These definitions were not shared by all children, but most children did use more than one definition to guide their reading behavior.
3. Ability group membership did not sufficiently explain definition construction in this classroom. Although the teacher's practices within reading groups influenced the constructed definitions, attributes of the children, such as developmental and personality factors, and entering notions of reading, were related to the definitions children constructed.
4. The study provided detailed illustrations of the processes and products of definition construction.
5. The study highlighted variables and raised questions which may help to focus further research in the area of reading.

#### Use of Findings to Research Community

The present study may be of use to reading researchers in at least three ways. First, the detailed descriptions and fine-grained analyses illuminated a number of variables which could be the object of further

investigation. Second, the findings suggest questions to be addressed in future investigations. Third, the study illustrates the use and the results of a methodology not often utilized in reading research. These possible uses are discussed below.

As is often the case in qualitative research, data analysis reveals a number of variables which have bearing on the questions of interest. In this study children's definitions of reading were found to be related to several variables, including developmental factors, teacher's practices, children's entering notions about reading, home experiences, personality factors, and the context in which the defining process took place. Previous studies have examined some of these variables, such as developmental factors (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982), teacher's practices (Mosenthal, 1983), home experiences (Anderson, Teale, & Estrada, 1980), and the immediate context (Bloome, 1982). Findings of the present study indicate that these variables form a complicated web of forces which interact to influence the child's definitions of reading and classroom reading experiences. Research must continue to explore the roles of each of these factors but with the goal of integrating factors to form a more complete picture of the experience of becoming a reader. This more comprehensive approach is time-consuming and expensive, but as the results of the few studies of this kind have shown, this approach promises significant contributions to our understanding of how children develop and fail to develop as readers (Au & Mason, 1981; Heath, 1983).

A number of questions are suggested by the present study. These questions relate to the variables that were discovered. A persistent

question for the researcher throughout the investigation concerned the studied children's out-of-school reading experiences. The researcher did not conduct extensive parent interviews nor did she observe in children's homes. As a result there were questions as to the nature of children's pre-kindergarten and current print experiences. Although some of the data shed light on these issues, a more concentrated effort to obtain this kind of information would have added to the researcher's understanding of individual children and their definitions of reading. Future studies in this area should attempt to bridge the gap between classroom and home.

Another question suggested by the study concerns the impact of developmental factors on children's definitions of reading. In this study, children who lacked cognitive clarity about reading constructed simplistic definitions. Are developmentally less mature children limited to simplistic notions of reading? In a different environment, exposed to different teacher practices, would the low children develop the more adult-like definitions of reading constructed by high group children in this study? For example, if the teacher relied heavily on language experience activities and encouraged the children to be active writers, what definitions would low group children construct?

Still another question concerns personality factors or school attitudes which influence children's behavior as readers. Why do some children who meet the school's definitions of bright and talented construct limited, restricting definitions of reading? Are there personality factors which influence their definitions? Do these young readers continue to be high-achievers as they move through the grades? Moreover,

what is the significance of children's definitions for their development as readers?

Other questions relate to the impact of the context on definition construction. Are there some definitions which children utilize across contexts and others which are constructed and abandoned as contexts change? Low group children in this study used the words-based definition consistently to guide their classroom reading. Do they use this definition at home, and will they use it in second grade? Researchers are just beginning to appreciate the significance of context in explaining and understanding children's language behavior (DeFord & Harste, 1982; Guthrie & Kirsch, 1984; Shultz, Florio, & Erickson, 1982). The role of context in children's reading is a fertile area to pursue.

Another question suggested by the study concerns the nature of individual children's experiences with classroom reading. While the study revealed children's constructed definitions of reading and demonstrated that children behaved differently from one another as readers, it did not explore in depth individual children's experience of classroom reading and reading instruction. One wonders, what is reading like for a child who does not know where the book begins or in which direction to read the words? How do these children emotionally and cognitively experience classroom reading events? Insight into this dimension of classroom life may explain why children seem to be more susceptible to some definitions than to others. Furthermore, such information may help educators understand why low group children so often remain in the low group.

Finally, this study illustrates a methodology seldom used in reading research. Qualitative, naturalistic investigations can yield products as well as illuminate teaching and learning processes. This kind of study with its ongoing data collection and analysis can provide a detailed picture of the phenomenon of interest. Rather than isolating variables, naturalistic studies examine a constellation of interrelating variables. The resulting detailed descriptions represent the texture of classroom processes as they are experienced by teachers and learners. In order to increase understanding of reading and learning to read, researchers need to have access to comprehensive, naturalistic investigations of readers in various contexts. The present study provides an example of how this can be accomplished and the kinds of results such studies can yield.

#### Use of Findings to Practitioners

Of what value is a study that focuses on processes within a single classroom? Although the findings can not be generalized to other settings, the fine-grained analysis of interactions within one classroom reveals the nature and complexity of teaching and learning processes which occur in all classrooms. The study has implications for teachers, their supervisors, and for teacher educators.

The study can serve a consciousness-raising function for classroom teachers. Children clearly can not be viewed as "the passive recipients of instruction" (Weinstein, 1983, p. 287) but rather as active interpreters of classroom phenomena. Teachers must recognize that their

students are always learning something, but they may not be learning what teachers think they are teaching. Students enter the classroom with abilities and attitudes which influence their interpretations of the teacher's practices. Not only do teachers need to become sensitive to their students' interpretations or perceptions of classroom phenomena, but they need to become sensitive to the messages they send to students. By actively monitoring their language and instructional practices, teachers can consider their potential impact on student learning. One way in which teachers can conduct such self-monitoring is to tape record lessons and to listen closely to student responses. Close attention to student behavior will help teachers identify their perceptions as well as mismatches between teacher and student perceptions. Effective instruction entails providing learning experiences which are congruent with students' ways of thinking about the subject of interest. Although Mrs. Saunders recognized that some of her low group children were "fragile readers," she did not adapt instruction to fit their vague, confused notions about reading. What kind of instruction might have been more suitable for these children?

According to Holdaway (1979), children must develop a healthy "literacy set" (p. 49) during a stage called "emergent reading" (p. 57) before they can productively and successfully participate in the "early reading stage." The literacy set involves abilities and attitudes which Downing (1979) referred to as cognitive clarity. These factors include positive expectations of print, familiarity with written language, strategies for processing written language, and knowledge of the conventions of print. Holdaway's shared-book-experience, in which



children proceed through the stages of discovery, exploration, and independent experience and expression with an enlarged version of a storybook, was created to help children develop the literacy set so essential to their progress as readers. This instructional model was based on the bed-time story situation and the independent experience with books and writing which bed-time stories generate among pre-school children. The shared-book-experience may be more appropriate for cognitively confused children than a didactic model emphasizing abstract concepts of print which are as yet meaningless to such children.

Children's print-related behavior in natural, out-of-school contexts is seen as the key to beginning reading instruction by other researchers (DeFord & Harste, 1982; Goodman, 1984; Taylor, 1982). Children who seem to be non-readers in school are likely to be "readers" when they participate in literacy events in meaningful contexts. For example, they may read road signs, find products in the supermarket, and identify labels on various items in their environment. Instruction of these classroom "non-readers" should begin in "meaningful language settings, where transactions are allowed to occur naturally" (DeFord & Harste, 1982, p. 590). In natural settings children are able to use their vast knowledge about language to make sense of the print they encounter. According to DeFord and Harste, "Within this perspective, littering the environment with meaningful print in settings which allow freedom of exploration fosters literacy learning. Teaching, rather than intervening in this process, is best viewed as supporting the learning that is already taking place" (p. 595).

The language experience approach to instruction might also be more appropriate for some beginning readers. In Holdaway's (1979) instructional model, language experience evolved naturally out of the shared-book-experience. Children's language becomes the source of stories and books which are dictated to the teacher and then shared with others or read individually. The connection between oral and written language as well as many conventions of print are learned as children experience them in the meaningful contexts of their own language. Donaldson (1978) pointed out that the correspondence between oral and written language was a critical concept for beginning readers to learn. The language experience approach would be useful in helping children to understand the nature and functions of written language, which Donaldson claimed to be so important to their development as readers. She further advocated that reflective thinking be developed in the early stages of reading instruction, wherein children would be encouraged "to consider possibilities of meaning" (p. 101). She added that instructional materials should reflect the grammatical forms of the child's speech, a recommendation also voiced by Clay (1972). Donaldson's suggestions would rule out the use of flash cards and stilted text in the reading instruction of young children.

Regarding the definitions constructed in the studied classroom, should a teacher be concerned if her students define reading as Mrs. Saunders' low group children did? Given Mrs. Saunders' stated beliefs that the time children spent with books contributed to their reading improvement and that children should think of reading as an enjoyable, exciting activity, there is cause for concern. Children

who used the words-based definition of reading spent less time with books than children who used more adult-like definitions. Perhaps if these children had constructed other definitions, they would have chosen to spend more time with books and other sources of print. Instruction of the kind described above, which provides children with meaningful and purposeful experiences with print, may contribute to different definitions of reading and hence different reading-related behavior.

The present study also has implications for those who supervise classroom teachers. Given that children do not always learn what teachers appear to be teaching, it is not sufficient for supervisors to evaluate teacher effectiveness based on a list of observed behaviors. Supervisors can better induce instructional improvement by attending closely to students' responses to teacher practice. If supervisors can sensitize teachers to children's perceptions of classroom phenomena and help them develop learning experiences which are congruent with children's ways of thinking, then real progress may be made in teacher effectiveness. In addition, supervisors and administrators who support teachers' efforts to provide instruction which is meaningful to learners, whether or not it is prescribed by a teacher's manual, will facilitate educational productivity and improvement. Regarding the kind of instruction provided for beginning readers, Clay (1972) wrote, "It becomes the responsibility of the school to arrange the early reading program in ways that do not require all five-year-olds to fit a single-size shoe" (p. 14).

For teacher educators, the present study has additional implications. Clearly it is not enough for instructors to provide preservice

teachers with a set of techniques to apply in the classroom. The input-output model implied by such practice does not approach the intricate complexities of teaching and learning in real classrooms. Prospective teachers need to be trained as self watchers and "kid watchers" (Goodman, 1978) who carefully observe and ongoingly evaluate both their own and children's behavior. Such diagnosticians must be sensitive to children's abilities, their errors, and their perceptions of the tasks to be learned. Teacher educators must prepare preservice teachers to be "adaptive experts" (Brown, Campione, Cole, Griffin, Mehan, & Riel, 1982) who are attuned to children's perceptions and who can adjust instruction to be congruent with their way of thinking. "Because the individuality of new entrants and a belief in group instruction are, initially, out of step," wrote Clay (1972), "an important quality in a good teacher of new entrants to school will be an ability to tolerate and use diverse responses in her pupils" (p. 15). Children do not need more teacher technicians; they need professional educators who can make intelligent decisions based on knowledge of their students and of the processes to be taught. Teachers who are sensitive to children and who examine the effects of their own practices on children's perceptions of reading are better equipped to create learning environments in which readers thrive and flourish.

APPENDIX A  
PROJECT OUTLINE

Working Title: An Ethnographic Account of First Graders'  
Perceptions of Literacy

- I. Main questions
  - A. What are the kinds of reading that occur in a first-grade classroom? This includes reading inside and outside of the reading group.
  - B. What do the children learn about the functions and purposes of reading? That is, what perceptions of literacy do children form in this classroom?
- II. Research methods
  - A. Participant observation: field notes (major data source)
  - B. Formal and informal interviewing: children, teacher, student teachers, volunteers, parents
  - C. Audio and video tape recording: to complement recorded fieldnotes and to validate emerging interpretations and explanations
- III. Subjects (Participants)
  - A. Children in top and bottom reading groups
  - B. Adults involved in classroom reading contexts
- IV. Researcher's role in the classroom
  - A. Spend two days each week observing in classroom
  - B. Avoid interactions with children
  - C. Ask questions of children and adults when necessary to gain insight into reading events
  - D. Avoid unnecessary movement around classroom

April 25, 1983

APPENDIX B  
OCTOBER INTERVIEW WITH MRS. SAUNDERS

1. Which books have you read to the class this year? Are there some others you plan to read to them in the near future?
2. You told me you felt you stuck with a lot of classics. What makes a children's book a classic?
3. If a new teacher asked you for advice as to what books first graders like, what would you tell him/her?
4. What led you to change the 30 minutes after lunch to a reading time? How do you think it's going?
5. How is your reading program this year different from your program last year?
6. How do I influence you?
7. I need to get a handle on the ways in which my presence influences you. How would you feel if I were to ask Mrs. James and maybe Mrs. Goodman for their impressions of how I influence you?
8. Who is having the most trouble with reading? What about that child tells you he/she is having trouble?
9. Who is your best reader? How do you know?
10. If you only had 10 minutes to meet with the low group, what would you do with them during that time?
11. If you only had 10 minutes to meet with the high group, what would you do with them?
12. I'm going to say a few of your students' names. Tell me what you think of when you hear the name: Susie, Robin, Jason, Sharon, Jane.
13. If you could do any kind of reading program you wanted with the low group, what would the program be like?
14. If you could do any kind of reading program you wanted with the high group, what would it be like?

APPENDIX C  
NOVEMBER INTERVIEW WITH MRS. SAUNDERS

1. Why did you begin the whole class phonics lessons? How would you evaluate their effectiveness at this point?
2. Are you especially concerned about any child's reading progress? Who? What causes you concern?
3. If you could get parents of low group children to do some reading-related activity with their children each evening, what would it be?
4. What kinds of activities would you want parents of high group children to do at home?
5. Imagine you're on a committee to evaluate the county reading program. What sorts of comments would you make about the series?
6. This summer I'm going to be teaching the reading course for elementary education students. What do you think are important messages I should try to communicate concerning teaching reading?

APPENDIX D  
DECEMBER INTERVIEW WITH MRS. SAUNDERS

1. Would you summarize your professional history?
2. Describe the school population, the staff, and support teachers.
3. What is the school's philosophy of reading instruction? What is the county's philosophy? What is your philosophy?
4. What elements of your reading program are you especially pleased with this year? Why?
5. What are some things you wish you had done differently in your reading program?
6. Who has made the most progress this year in reading? How do you know?
7. Who is the slowest, least developed reader? How do you know?
8. Who is the best reader? How do you know?
9. What does "reading" mean to Jason? Jane? Sally? Tommy? Mike?



APPENDIX E  
INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER IN ADJOINING ROOM

1. You know Mrs. Saunders very well, and you've taught with her for several years. How do you think my presence in her classroom is influencing her?
2. Has her instructional program changed from past years?
3. Does the classroom atmosphere seem to be different from past years?
4. Do you have any sense of whether the children behave differently when I'm in the room?

APPENDIX F  
INTERVIEW WITH KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

1. Tell me about (child) as a reader last year.
2. Was he/she interested in reading?
3. What kinds of things did he/she do during free-choice periods?
4. How did you foresee his/her future as a reader?

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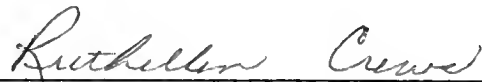
## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Elizabeth Bondy was born and raised in Mamaroneck, New York. She received the Bachelor of Arts degree in child study and psychology from Tufts University in 1976. After teaching for two years at the Landmark School in Prides Crossing, Massachusetts, she moved to Gainesville, Florida. There she taught at Gainesville Academy for two years. In 1980 she married Bill Dunn and entered graduate school at the University of Florida.

Ms. Bondy received the Master of Education degree in 1981. She specialized in reading. Following her master's program she entered the doctoral program in curriculum and instruction, again specializing in reading. During her three years in the program Ms. Bondy taught undergraduate classes in reading. She also taught and supervised pre-service elementary school teachers. She will receive the Ph.D. from the University of Florida in 1984.

Ms. Bondy will serve as adjunct assistant professor in the Elementary and Early Childhood Education Department at the University of Florida beginning in August, 1984.

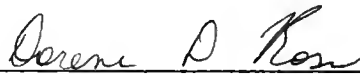
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Ruthellen Crews, Chairperson  
Professor of Instructional Leadership  
and Support

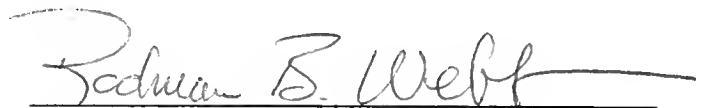
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Dorene D. Ross  
Associate Professor of General Teacher  
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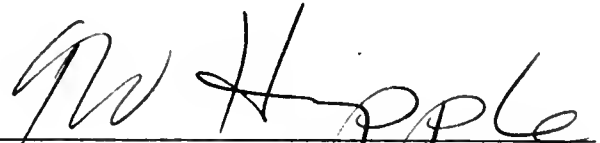
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Rodman B. Webb  
Associate Professor of Foundations  
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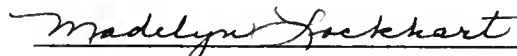
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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Theodore W. Hipple". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Theodore W. Hipple  
Professor of Instructional Leadership  
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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Division of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education and to the Graduate School, and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

August 1984

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Madelyn Lockhart". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Dean for Graduate Studies and  
Research

